DATING APPS PASSION AND ITS PERILS

CONGRESS GOING AGGRO ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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INDIA TODAY

INDIA'S MOMENT

AS PRESIDENT OF THE WORLD'S MOST POWERFUL GROUPING OF NATIONS, INDIA CAN PILOT A CONSENSUS ON KEY INTERNATIONAL CONCERNS AND EMERGE AS A TRULY GLOBAL LEADER

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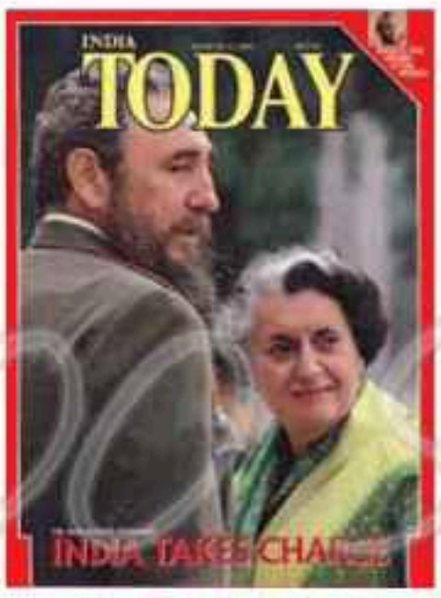
VISIT…

FROM THE

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

For a year, beginning in December, India will take its place in the centre stage of international affairs. It assumes the rotating presidency of the G20, one of the most influential groupings of world powers, with the bandwidth to steer and even alter the course of geopolitical interactions. It is a role that befits it—a kind of neutral referee, speaking from a position of authority, but also with a uniquely non-partisan voice that every nation can listen to. Coincidentally, India also assumes the presidency of the all-powerful UN Security Council in December for a month and will chair the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the world's largest regional forum, till September 2023. Suddenly, it feels like India's moment under the sun. The G20 is the prize seat at the high table. Here, New Delhi has the occasion to bring its statesmanship and independently crafted position on the global stage into the thorny area of multilateral negotiations.

From now to late 2023, India will host upwards of 200 global meetings in 56 locations across its map—from Srinagar to Thiruvananthapuram, from the Rann of Kutch to Kohima, covering all states and Union territories. The topics will span the gamut of issues that bedevil nations—trade and economy, international taxation, financial inclusion, the digital economy, tourism, health, food security and agriculture, energy and climate change. These are organised into two primary tracks: the Finance track, consisting of eight work streams, will have 40 meetings; the other, the Sherpa Track, consisting of 13 working groups, will have 60 sessions. Then there will be 15 high-level ministerial meetings, including one of foreign and finance ministers. Besides 12 engagement groups for non-governmental entities engaged with business, science, gender issues and—this is India's addition—start-ups. These groups will have over 50 meetings, 25 seminars and workshops. A new-look Pragati Maidan in Delhi will host the main summit in September 2023—expect 43 heads of states, governments and international organisations, besides special invitees. Alongside await a treat of Festivals of India at Ahmedabad, Konark, Surajkund, Kohima and Khajuraho—the *mela* ground excitement that we are naturally good at.



March 31, 1983

What does all this dizzying activity add up to? That has to be understood in terms of the opportunities and challenges it presents. The G20 is a unique platform. Not a decision-making, executive body with the kind of remit that multilateral agencies like the UN, IMF, World Bank or the WHO have, but one that offers a unique space for consensus-building among the comity of nations, whose word then often carries over to the ones that lay down the rules.

Last July, for instance, the G20, along with the OECD, evolved the idea of a minimum corporate tax of 15 per cent for MNCs, which were otherwise prone to evading giving anything up on their profits by operating from tax havens. In 2018, it was on the margins of the summit in Buenos Aires that the North American free trade agreement CUSMO came about. Before that, the global Financial Stability Board (FSB) of April 2009 and the Basel III framework of July 2009 that introduced stricter capital and liquidity requirements for banks were fruits of the G20 summitry. Even at the geopolitical level, the Joe Biden-Xi Jinping interaction in Bali last month helped bring a touch of equanimity to relations that had otherwise assumed a hard edge of hostility. Therefore, the G20 is no mere talking shop—its very nature allows it to surmount partisan interests and reach for multilateral coordination.

The formation of the G20 in 1999 speaks to how the world economy has been evolving in recent decades. It was the Asian financial crisis that triggered its birth, initially as a forum for finance ministers that included these countries. Former US president George W. Bush scaled it up in 2008 to the political leadership level after the global meltdown—lending it a more well-rounded geopolitical dimension. Now, this grouping of developed and developing nations represents 85 per cent of the world's GDP, 75 per cent of international trade, and 60 per cent of the planet's population—numbering some 4.6 billion people. And India will be the master of ceremonies as the members of this global club confer.

To understand why this is a vital position and not just a ceremonial role, look only at the state of the world. Turmoil surrounds us on all fronts. The post-pandemic scenario is still tipping towards what everybody predicts will be a global recession next year. Over 70 countries, including our neighbours Sri Lanka and Pakistan, are facing crippling national debt levels. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has only exacerbated the global supply chain disruptions caused by Covid-19. From wheat exports to the energy crisis that Europe stares at to the new urgency that marks climate change discussions, there's a universal sense that 2022-23 will be a critical passage for the planet. This is the stage that India enters, not just as an impresario but as a country with its unique footprint in, and sway over, world affairs.

A rising power, it is also one that still carries the gene of Global South solidarity. Thus, we can be an honest broker talking about solutions. Western critics can see New Delhi's old friendship with Moscow as posing a conflict of interest. Still, it also invests India with exceptional leverage as a party that can talk to both sides and arrive at a consensus to end the war. Outcomes will be critical as India's G20 presidency hits its stride—it aims to push for a financial toolkit that can reform the terms of multilateral lending, means to enable climate-friendly energy transitions, and carry forward the work on rationalising global corporate tax regimes. All this is intended to ensure that poorer nations secure a better deal.

Group Editorial Director Raj Chengappa brings his vast expertise in international affairs to unpack this complex but infinitely fascinating picture for our cover story this week. How Prime Minister Modi uses the next year to legitimise India's quest for a diplomatic space in global affairs while also showcasing India in all its myriad colours will be fascinating. India's theme—'One Earth, One Family, One Future'—reflects the desire to steer this synergy. Streamlining our efforts—rather than reversing protectionism —is the only way out for humanity.

(Aroon Purie)

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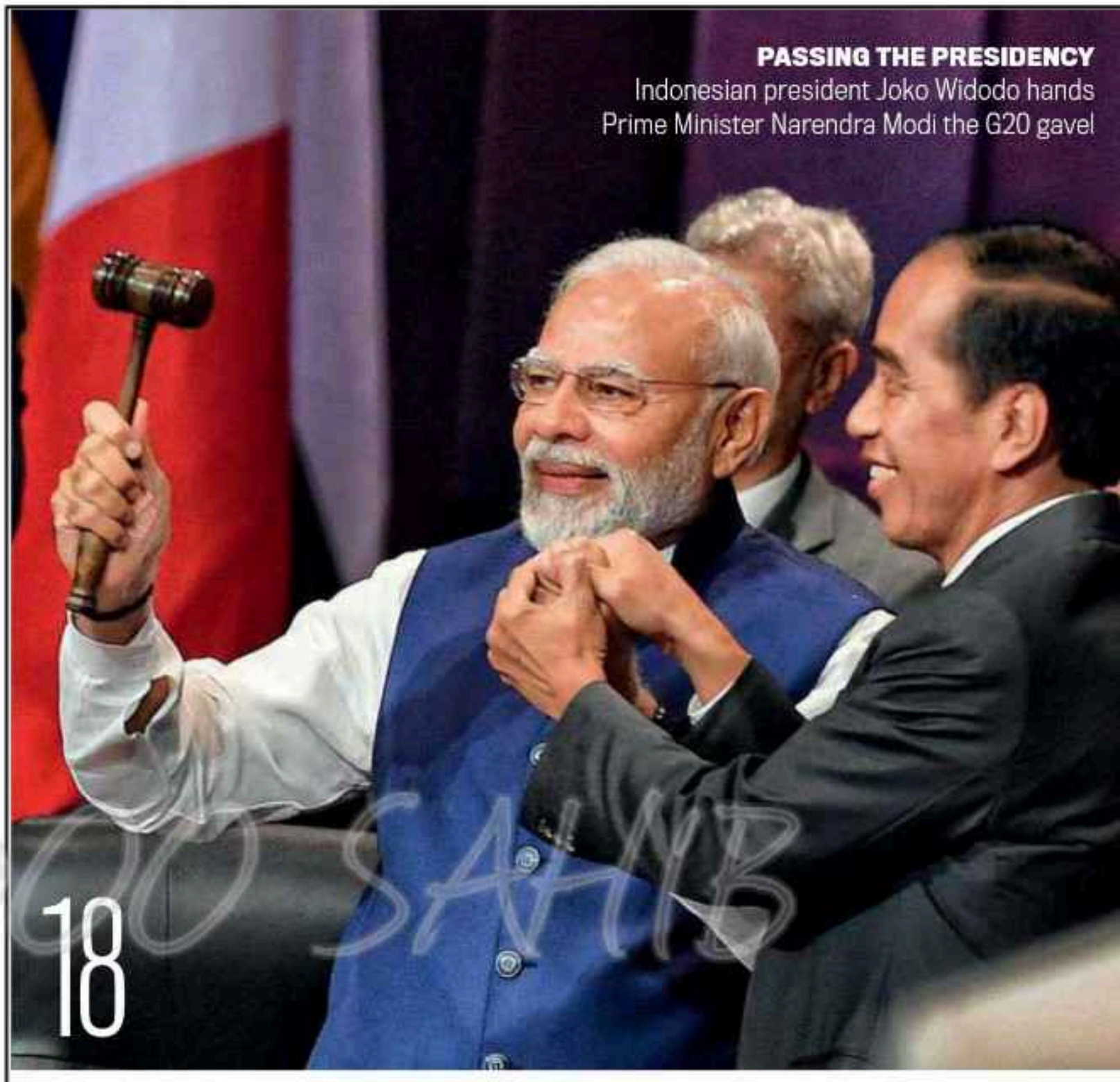

PASSING THE PRESIDENCY
Indonesian president Joko Widodo hands Prime Minister Narendra Modi the G20 gavel

COVER STORY

INDIA'S MOMENT

As president of G20, the most powerful grouping of nations, India can pilot consensus on key global concerns and emerge as a world leader

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In cover photo-montage, L-R: Russian president Vladimir Putin, Chinese president Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, US president Joe Biden and French president Emmanuel Macron

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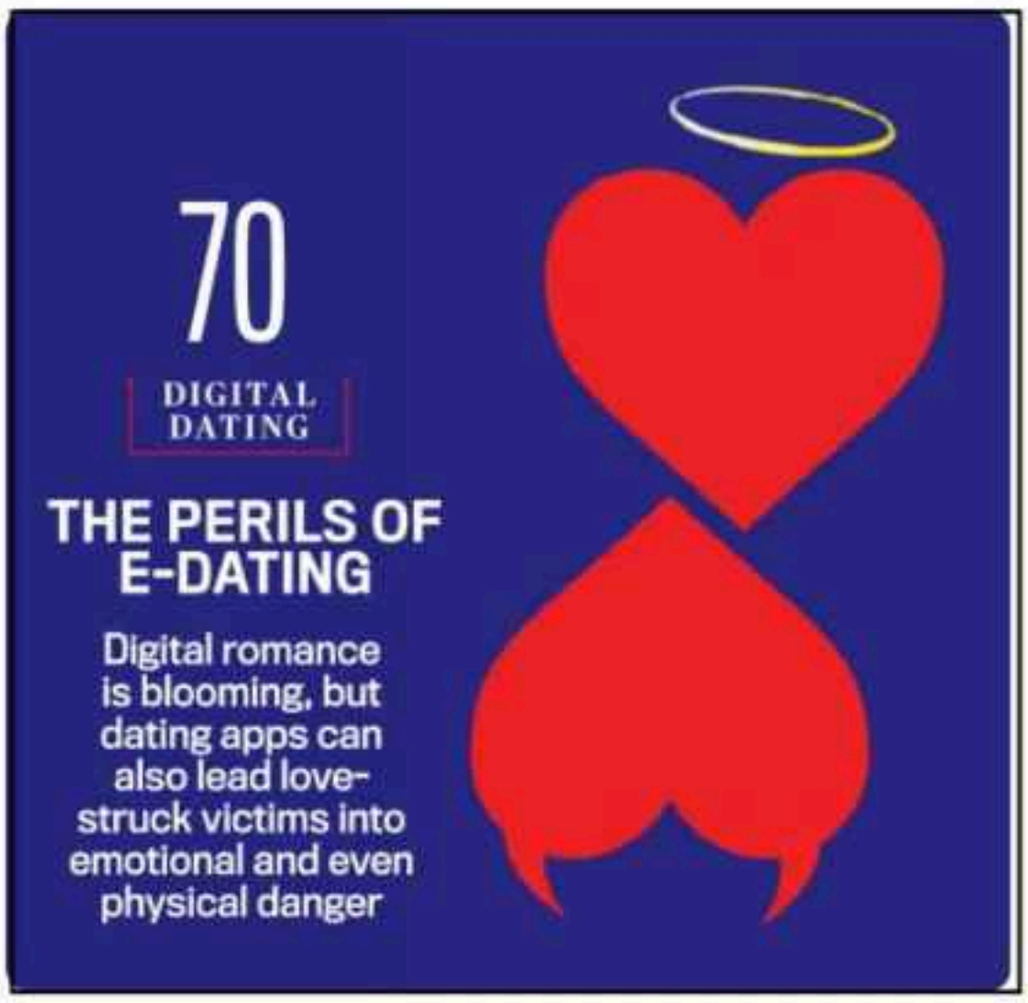

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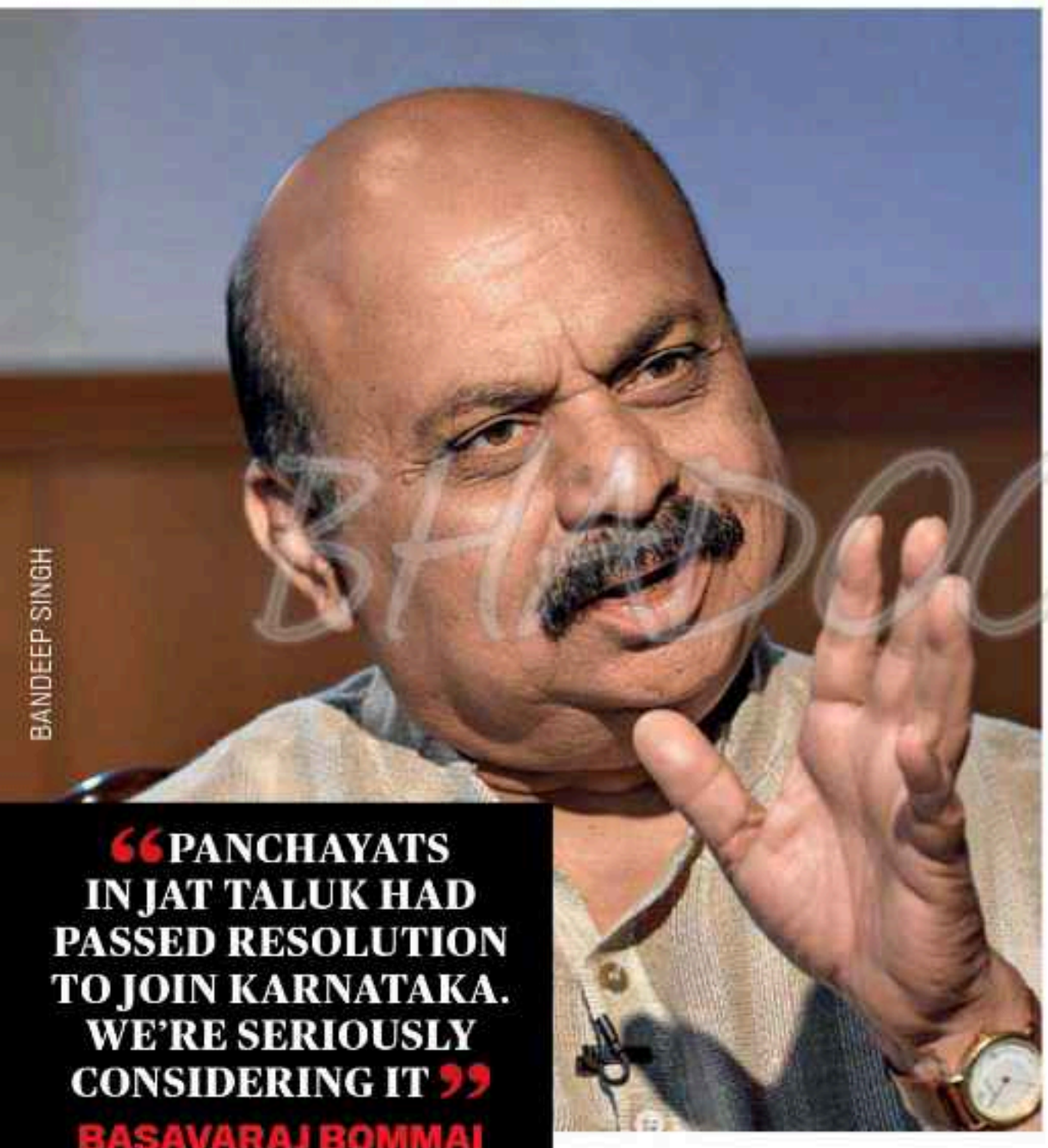
KARNATAKA/ MAHARASHTRA

Battle for Belagavi

By Ajay Sukumaran



BANDEEP SINGH

"PANCHAYATS IN JAT TALUK HAD PASSED RESOLUTION TO JOIN KARNATAKA. WE'RE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERING IT"

BASAVARAJ BOMMAI
Chief Minister, Karnataka

ANI

"THE STATE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO GET JUSTICE FOR EVERY BROTHER IN THE BORDER AREAS"

EKNATH SHINDE
Chief Minister, Maharashtra

As disputes between states go, the row over Belagavi (formerly Belgaum) has a life of its own. Simmering for decades, it periodically froths over—like it did last December and the year before, with many iterations going back in time to India's state reorganisation on linguistic grounds beginning in the mid-1950s. On all occasions, tensions had risen temporarily in the border district that belongs to Karnataka but which Maharashtra has, for decades, claimed as its territory—on the emotive grounds that it has a significant population of Marathi speakers. It has resurfaced this year too, amid an explosion of rhetoric that had the biggest political players on both sides weighing in, with everyone girding up ahead of Supreme Court proceedings.

In Maharashtra, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde met an all-party panel on the border dispute and even promised to extend the CM's relief fund coverage and freedom fighter pensions to families that were involved in the decades-long revanchist struggle. The 'provocation' got an equally sharp response, for Belagavi is an equally emotive issue for Kannada speakers. All border disputes, retorted Shinde's Karnataka counterpart Basavaraj Bommai, had ended with the States' Reorganisation Act in 1956. But since there's a lawsuit in court, Karnataka's top

priority was arguing its case well, he said, adding, "We have strong grounds." Not to be outdone, the Karnataka CM also spoke of providing freedom fighter pensions across the border and funds for Kannada-medium schools there—for there also exist notable Kannada-speaking areas in Maharashtra. Bommai has also appointed a new chairman to the Karnataka Border and River Protection Commission (a position that had been lying vacant) and proposed an all party-meeting on his side of the fence to discuss the issue.

Belagavi is a difficult leftover from the days when India decided the best way to create its states was on the basis of language. The new Mysore state—before it was renamed Karnataka in 1973—was formed in 1956 by amalgamating districts that were earlier governed by the Nizam's state of Hyderabad and the directly British-ruled Madras and Bombay presidencies. In that process, the districts of Belgaum (except for Chandgad taluk), Bijapur, Dharwar and Kanara were transferred to the new state from Bombay. But with boundary disputes persisting between Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala, the Centre constituted a one-man commission with Meherchand Mahajan, a former chief justice of India, in October 1966, to resolve the issue.

Mahajan's report, which came in August 1967, recommended that 264 villages be transferred from Mysore to Maharashtra and 247 villages from the Maratha side back to the southern state. So towns such as Nippani, Khanapur and Nandgad were to go to Maharashtra while Mysore was to get the talukas of South Solapur, Akkalkot and Jat. As for Belgaum city, crucially, he recommended that it stay with Karnataka. An aggrieved Maharashtra demanded that the report be rejected outright while Karnataka called for its implementation in toto. The issue has festered ever since, flaring up notably in 1986 with border agitations that claimed nine lives.

Belagavi is an agricultural district known for its 24 sugar factories, besides being a hub of foundries. With its sizeable Marathi population, Belagavi city itself—located almost exactly halfway between Bengaluru and Mumbai—had been a base for the political outfit Maharashtra Ekikaran Samiti (MES). Formed in 1948 with the agenda of uniting Marathi-speaking regions, the MES used to win assembly seats in the region and controlled the Belagavi City Corporation through the 1980s, even passing council resolutions for a merger with Maharashtra. In 2005, when an MES-led city council passed such a resolution, the city mayor Vijay More was manhandled by Kannada activists in Bengaluru who blackened his face with ink. A year ago, Kannada activists similarly smeared black ink on another MES leader, Deepak Dalvi, for leading a protest against the Karnataka legislature's winter session being held in Belagavi.

The Belagavi sessions were a fallout of the dispute. In 2004, Maharashtra, whose main demand is that a region encompassing 865 villages and Belagavi city be handed over to it, filed a lawsuit in the Supreme Court. Karnataka responded by announcing Belagavi as its second capital. From 2006, the city hosted the legislature sessions in December. Even a second state secretariat—a replica of Bengaluru's Vidhana Soudha—was built there. In 2014, the Centre cleared a long-pending proposal to formalise the Kannada names of Karnataka's cities. Bangalore became Bengaluru, Mysore became Mysuru...and Belgaum became Belagavi. The last one has never sat well with Maharashtra.

From those crescendos, the issue had quietened over the past decade. Since the 1990s, the MES has been losing ground in Belagavi city to the BJP and Congress, says Ashok Chandargi, president of the Belagavi District Kannada Organisations Action Committee. "It is an emotional issue but people see through the political agendas," he says. "We have always insisted that the public should not be made to suffer due to the border issue."

In December 2019, Uddhav Thackeray, then newly become Maharashtra CM, triggered a war of words with his pledge to unite 'Karnataka-occupied' Marathi-speaking regions. For the Shiv Sena, which has backed the MES in elections, the border issue is closely linked to the party's core plank of Marathi

"NO VILLAGE IN MAHARASHTRA WILL GO TO KARNATAKA! THE STATE WILL FIGHT IN THE SC TO GET MARATHI-SPEAKING AREAS INCLUDING BELGAUM, KARWAR, NIPPANI"

DEVENDRA FADNAVIS
Maharashtra Dy CM

"@BJP4KARNATAKA SHOULD WAKE UP AND CALL FOR AN ALL-PARTY MEETING TO DISCUSS THE WAY FORWARD"

SIDDARAMAIAH
Ex-CM, Karnataka (Congress)

"IF KARNATAKA IS READY TO LEAVE BELGAUM, KARWAR AND NIPPANI, THEN WE CAN DISCUSS WHAT CAN BE GIVEN TO THEM"

SHARAD PAWAR
NCP chief

in both states, in a tricky spot. So when Bommai, on November 22, said he was considering resolutions passed by gram panchayats in Jat taluk to accede to Karnataka, it was Maharashtra deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis who responded that the resolution was a decade old and that "no village in Maharashtra will go to Karnataka".

The Supreme Court has so far dwelt only on the basic technical questions. Karnataka's argument, says a senior lawyer, is that the suit is not maintainable—via Article 3 of the Constitution, which confers on Parliament the power to form new states or alter boundaries. Maharashtra, meanwhile, is invoking Article 131, which gives the Supreme Court jurisdiction in disputes between states.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra ministers Chandrakant Patil (BJP) and Shambhuraj Desai (Shiv Sena-Shinde faction) plan to visit Belagavi on December 3 on the invitation of MES activists in the city. To this, Kannada activists like Ashok Chandargi are urging Bommai to dispatch a similar tit-for-tat delegation to Jat. The border, clearly, is set to see more shelling. ■

pride (hence the political sine qua non for current CM Shinde, who leads a breakaway faction that's claiming the legacy of the late Bal Thackeray). But it also puts the BJP, which is in power

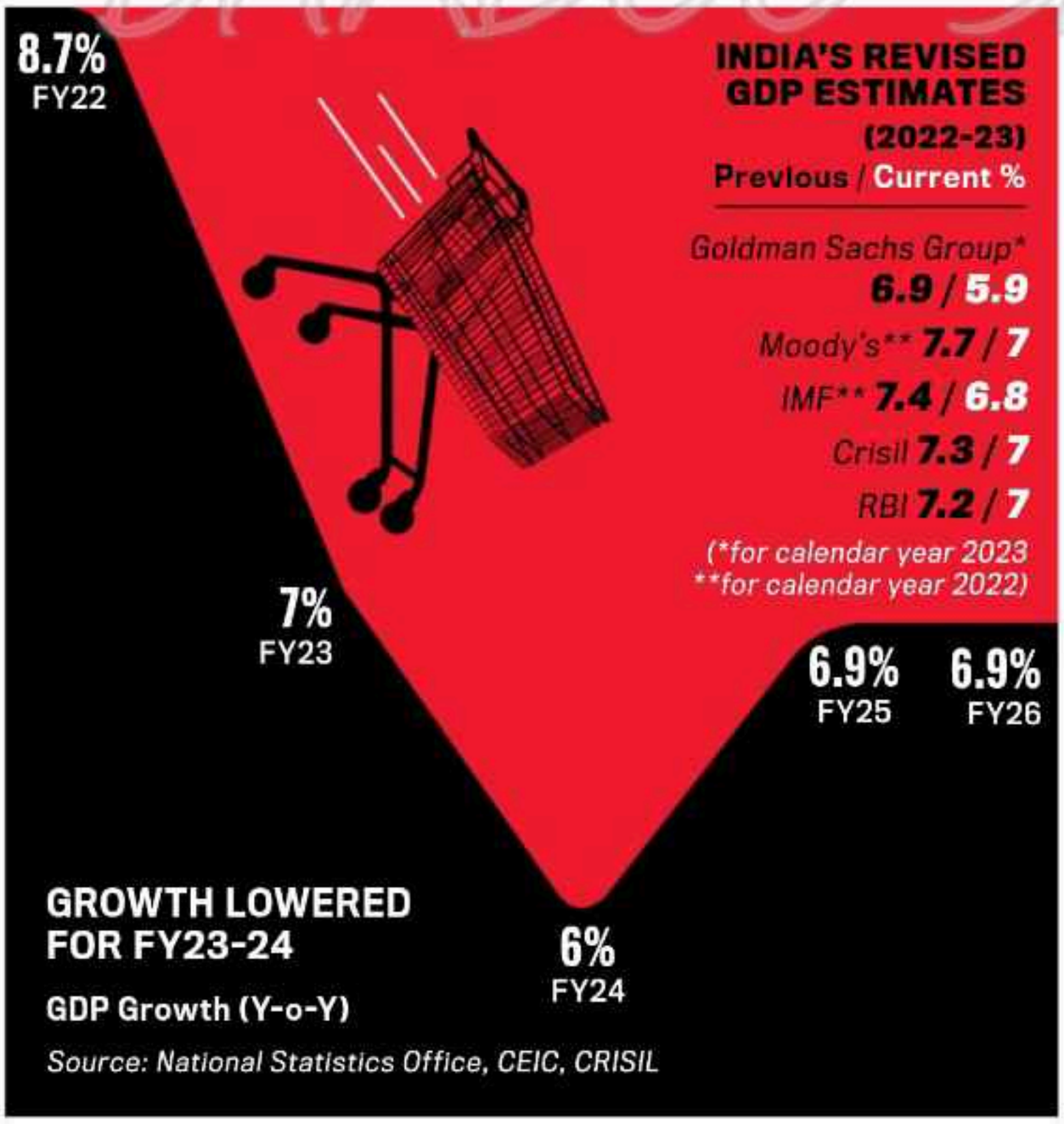
ECONOMY

WHAT IS HURTING INDIA'S GROWTH

By M.G. Arun

A host of global agencies as well as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) have revised India's growth estimates for the year 2022-23—and beyond. All of them underline the fact that the economy continues to be vulnerable to a slew of external shocks as well as high inflation and rising interest rates that will dampen demand on the domestic front. These call for an urgent need to boost demand through better job creation, while pumping up government spending on infrastructure projects, as the Centre moves closer to its annual budget presentation on February 1.

Goldman Sachs Group Inc, for instance, sees India's economic growth slowing next year, citing a hit to consumer demand from higher borrowing costs and fading benefits from the pandemic reopening. Lowering its growth forecast in a report, it now says India's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to expand only by 5.9 per cent in the calendar year 2023—its earlier estimate was 6.9 per cent. Meanwhile, ratings firm Crisil has trimmed its GDP growth forecast for 2022-23 to 7 per cent from 7.3 per cent. Crisil also expects India's GDP growth to slow to 6 per cent in fiscal 2024, down from the 6.5 per cent estimated previously, as global growth is expected to fall



Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

faster next fiscal. In addition, domestic demand could come under pressure as interest rate hikes get transmitted more to consumers, and the benefits from a revival in contact-based services such as retail and hospitality fade, it said. In November, Moody's cut its India GDP growth forecast for 2022 to 7 per cent from its earlier estimates of 7.7 per cent. RBI, too, has revised its GDP growth rate estimates for 2022-23 to 7 per cent from 7.2 per cent. Meanwhile, in the second quarter of this fiscal, the economy grew at 6.3 per cent, lower than the expectations of most analysts.

The general narrative about India is that it is still a bright spot in an otherwise gloomy horizon, especially at a time when many countries in the developed world, including the US, are under the shadow of a recession. But there are issues that India needs to be concerned about. The country's growth momentum will be affected by the fading effects of post-Covid reopening, coupled with higher borrowing costs, as per the Goldman Sachs report. "Growth will likely be a tale of two halves, with a slower first half as the reopening boost fades, and monetary tightening weighs on domestic demand. In the second half, growth is likely to re-accelerate as global growth recovers, the drag from net exports diminishes, and the investment cycle picks up," it said.

D.K. Joshi, chief economist with Crisil, attributes the reasons for the downward revision of the full-year GDP to three factors. In large part, the downward revision in this year's estimates is because the slowdown in the global economy has already begun to impact India's exports, he says. In the first quarter (April-June), exports had grown by 24.8 per cent, only to fall to a mere 2.8 per cent growth in the second quarter. In October, exports were 16.7 per cent lower than last year. Second, the RBI has been raising rates, the results of which will be felt next year. "These will impact growth, and the effects will spill over. It will not impact government investment," he says. Third, there are still no signs of a broad-based revival of private investment. Infrastructure-linked sectors such as steel and cement are seeing some investment but not consumer goods. "On that front, investments are on a wait-and-watch mode. Unless the uncertainty comes down, particularly on the global front, the private sector won't be excited enough to invest," Joshi told INDIA TODAY.

THE KEY FACTORS

- Slowing global economic outlook, a possible recession
- Prolonged war in Ukraine; likely to intensify in coming months
- High inflation that is denting consumer spending
- Lower exports from India that will widen the trade deficit
- A series of interest rate hikes by the RBI to cool inflation, which is hurting demand
- Low capacity utilisation, leading to sagging private investment

He says that there are two risks to the global economy. The first is that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is becoming more painful, and the second, inflation in advanced countries is showing no sign of coming down. "Central banks will therefore raise interest rates more than they should," he says. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) had forecast in October that one-third of the globe will witness a recession this year or the next. "This year's shocks will reopen economic wounds that were only partially healed post-pandemic," wrote IMF economic counsellor Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas in a blog post accompanying the fund's World Economic Outlook. The three biggest economies—the US, European Union and China—will continue to stall, he warned. "The worst is yet to come and, for many people, 2023 will feel like a recession," Gourinchas wrote.

To be sure, there have been a few positives for the domestic economy that point to a revival post the Covid-19 pandemic. Monthly Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection has been more than Rs 1.4 lakh crore for eight months in a row. September saw 83 million e-way bills being generated, compared to 77 million in August—an indicator of better movement of goods and commercial activity in general. Industrial production too rose 3.1 per cent in September, surpassing expectations. "The question is whether consumption will be maintained in the remaining six months of the year. That will impact the overall growth prospects," says Madan Sabnavis, chief economist with the Bank of Baroda.

There is also a lag in spending at the state level compared to what the Centre has spent. "Look at what the central government is spending and see what ratio of the budget has been exhausted in the first month. The Centre has done fairly well, closer to 40-45 per cent. But states have done only 20-25 per cent," he says. States are deferring expenditure so that they don't slip on their fiscal deficit numbers, and will probably start investing only towards the end of the year, he adds.

Moreover, falling exports are leading to a widening of the trade deficit (the difference between the value of our exports and imports), which, in turn, will impact the growth numbers. A definite way to ensure better growth is a sharper focus on job creation, which is critical to boosting consumption on a sustained basis. One way to do this, say experts, is by reviving manufacturing as that will lead to jobs with higher income, necessary for propping up demand. That will have to be a thrust area when finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the next Union Budget, they say. ■

PTI

MADHYA PRADESH JODO
Kamal Nath used the yatra itinerary to firm up the Congress's standing

MADHYA PRADESH

WALKING THE BHOPAL TALK

By Rahul Noronha

The Madhya Pradesh leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra has offered the local Congress a chance to prep up for the next assembly election. November 2023 is still a year away, but state Congress chief and former chief minister Kamal Nath wants to use the yatra's momentum to the party's advantage. In a 12-day itinerary, the yatra route maps out 17 assembly segments in six districts in the state's Malwa and Nimar regions. Barring the tribal-dominated seats here, where the Congress is still strong, both are considered BJP strongholds. In 2018, the Congress had improved its tally here though, mopping up 34 of 66 seats in the Indore and Ujjain divisions (both in Malwa)—a crucial contributor to its victory. A good chance then to try and put some sheen back into its image. That Priyanka Gandhi joined her brother Rahul for the first time as the yatra entered MP on November 23, at Bodarli village in Burhanpur district, could not have harmed that cause.

One of the avowed objectives of the yatra, as stated by Rahul Gandhi, is to stand against "hatred, violence and fear". The party got an opportunity to set that in a real context as the yatra passed through Khargone—the town had witnessed communal riots in April. A controversy broke out on November 25, as a video surfaced with a pro-Pakistan slogan being allegedly heard in it during the Khargone leg. Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan promptly raked it up, while the Congress accused the BJP of putting out a "doctored video".

THE YATRA'S PRIME FOCUS WAS ON TRIBAL VOTERS, WHO HAD MOSTLY BACKED CONGRESS IN 2018

But a good part of the focus was on tribals. After Adivasi communities supported the Congress nearly universally in 2018, they have become a focus group for the BJP and it is trying to woo them with a combination of symbolism and concrete policy—not the least of which is the implementation of PESA (Provision of the Panchayats) Rules in scheduled areas, which had been pending for 26 years. So the Congress has been presenting itself as the tribals' "original friend", with Rahul repeating his recent criticism of PM Narendra Modi for calling them vanvasis. On November 24, during a visit to the Khandwa home of tribal icon Tantiya Bheel—who had fought the British in the 19th century—he accused the RSS of "supporting the British". Incidentally, Tantiya is one among many tribal heroes the BJP has named as being ignored by previous Congress governments. To counter any Congress gains among tribal communities, the BJP has announced a yatra of its own: the PESA Jagrukta (Awareness) Yatra.

There was another positive spinoff to be hoped for: addressing infighting in the state Congress. Kamal Nath appointed independent MLA Surendra Singh to take care of the Burhanpur leg of the yatra and his arch-rival, Congress's Arun Yadav, for Khargone. Rahul's presence is expected to smoothen out differences among leaders. "The presence of Rahulji and Priyankaji will galvanise party workers. The long-standing association of the Congress with tribal communities will be reinforced. And the yatra will nullify the effect of the divisive politics practised by BJP," says Kamal Nath.

The rest of it was taken up with checking other boxes: a Narmada *aarti* at Omkareshwar, the Mahakal temple, a historical gurudwara and the Dargah-e-Hakimi, a religious site of the Dawoodi Bohra community, in Burhanpur, and the birthplace of B.R. Ambedkar at Mhow. ■

ANI

AP

ANI

WE HEREBY PROMISE... (Clockwise from above) The BJP, Congress and AAP release their poll manifestos

GUJARAT/ POLL PROMISES

WOOING THE YOUNG URBANITE

By Jumana Shah in Ahmedabad

The aspirational middle-class voter has replaced the poor villager as the main target of political messaging in Gujarat. About 45 per cent of its voters are under 40; it's also India's second-most urbanised state, with 44.45 per cent of the population living in cities. Some 58 of its 182 seats are now urban—the BJP won 44 of them in 2017—and another 35-40 have graduated to semi-urban status. All this is showing in the political discourse: wooing the middle class is thus an imperative for both BJP and AAP (the Congress reverting to its old KHAM caste alliance means it has little contribution to the poll narrative). The mockery of '*revdi* culture' notwithstanding, the sops this time are mainly reserved for the young and unemployed across categories. Nothing illustrates the tilt better than a conspicuous absence in the BJP's slew of promises. As sociologist Ghanshyam Shah points out, "Farmers are not even being talked about."

BJP'S PROMISES

- Making Gujarat a $1 trillion economy in five years—which would entail a four-time jump from its current size, Rs 19.4 lakh crore
- Hosting the 2036 Olympics in Ahmedabad
- Four Gujarat institutes of technology on the lines of the IITs
- Two AIIMS-level institutions
- Attracting Rs 5 lakh crore foreign investment, making Gujarat India's defence and aviation manufacturing hub
- Setting up two seafood parks (one each in south Gujarat and Saurashtra), building India's first Blue Economy Industrial Corridor

FREEBIES FREE-FOR-ALL

Education
BJP: Free, quality education to all female students from KG to PG
Congress: Free education for marginalised communities in govt facilities—KG to PG
AAP: Free education for all in government schools

Healthcare
BJP: Doubling free healthcare cover from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh under Aayushman Bharat plus free diagnostics in public hospitals and empanelled laboratories for EWS households
Congress: A Rs 10 lakh health insurance and Rs 5 lakh accident insurance network in a public healthcare map covering the whole state
AAP: Free healthcare in government facilities

Cooking gas
BJP: Two free LPG cylinders in a year for EWS households
Congress: Subsidised cylinder costing Rs 500
AAP: Silent

Housing
BJP: Ensuring every citizen in Gujarat has a pucca house, 100 per cent implementation of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana
Congress: Housing for all landless and homeless families on priority

Food
BJP: 1 litre of edible oil four times a year, 1 kg subsidised chana per month through PDS

Electricity
BJP (in Modi's speech, not manifesto): Earn from generating

electricity, not get it free
AAP/ Congress: Free 300 units

↘ Jobs
BJP: 2 million jobs in five years, women to get 100,000 government jobs
AAP/ Congress: 1 million new government jobs. Congress, additionally, promises 500,000 government jobs plus 33 per cent reservation for women

↘ Unemployment benefits
BJP: Silent
AAP/ Congress: Rs 3,000 monthly dole to youth. AAP promises additional Rs 1,000 allowance to women above 18

↘ Other freebies
BJP: Free electric scooters to meritorious college-going female students from financially weak households, free bus travel to female senior citizens, free bicycles to all female students from Class 9 to 12
Congress: Free laptop for MBA, engineering and medical students

↘ Urban infrastructure
BJP: Saurashtra Express Highway Grid to be developed. Seamless connectivity between important economic hubs. Decongesting cities with satellite townships, increasing ease of living with riverfronts, recreational parks, urban forests, traffic management systems. Metro service in Gandhinagar, Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara
Congress: Metro in Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara

↘ Religion
BJP: Devbhumi Dwarka Corridor to be established as western India's biggest spiritual centre, the world's tallest Krishna statue
Congress: Direct bus connectivity to places of pilgrimage
AAP: Free visit to Ayodhya

↘ Farmers' loans
BJP: Silent
Congress: Waive farmer loans up to Rs 3 lakh
AAP: Waive farmers' outstanding loans up to Rs 2 lakh

UTTAR PRADESH

FALL OF A 'VICE' CHANCELLOR

POWER, CUT
V-C Vinay Kumar Pathak

By Prashant Srivastava

It's unusual for universities to be considered playgrounds of the power elite, but one vice-chancellor in Uttar Pradesh had managed to do exactly that in the past decade and a half. Vinay Kumar Pathak, 53, the V-C of the Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University in Kanpur, whose misdeeds are now under the scanner of the UP police, held the chair in different universities for almost 13 years.

The man himself has gone AWOL but the FIR against him lists a number of charges, including bribery, corruption, illegal confinement and extortion. Apart from this, there is a pending investigation from back in 2018 on charges levelled by a University Grants Commission (UGC) member referring to "plagiarism and misrepresentation of facts" in his CV. One of the charges is that his profile claimed he had been elevated as a professor in January 2006 at the Harcourt Butler Technical Institute in Kanpur, while in reality the promotion came a year later, in January 2007. On November 12, the Allahabad High Court rejected a petition filed by him to quash the FIR. The STF (special task force) investigating the case has got a lookout notice out for the V-C.

Pathak, though controversial, has had stints as V-C of several UP universities

On October 29, David Denis, man-

aging director of a private firm that had been engaged to do pre- and post-exam work at the Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Agra University since 2014, claimed that Pathak had taken a total of Rs 1.41 crore in bribes—15 per cent of the total amount—to clear his company's dues of Rs 9.76 crore (the V-C had additional charge of the university between January 2022 and September 2022).

Pathak's close aide, Ajay Mishra, was arrested on October 30. Another associate, Ajay Jain, was arrested on November 6. Denis has alleged that the bribe money was delivered to Mishra's residence at Khurram Nagar in Lucknow, as instructed by Pathak. The complainant says the delays in clearances, threats and bribes have left his company "on the verge of collapse".

The plagiarism allegations from 2018 actually date back to events that unfolded in 2009, when Pathak had applied for the V-C's post at the Uttarakhand Open University. Media reports from 2018 say former UGC member Dharmendra Yadav had red-flagged the issue after seeking out Pathak's CV under the Right to Information Act. But even after the hullabaloo, Pathak, at the time the V-C of Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Technical University (AKTU), Lucknow, got a second term with then UP governor Ram Naik clearing his name on August 2, 2018.

Pathak, a PhD in computer science, had a great run with the V-C post despite the many allegations that cropped up against him. He held the top post at Uttarakhand Open University, Haldwani (2009-12), Vardhman Mahaveer Open Univer-

TELANGANA

LAW OF THE JUNGLE

By Amarnath K. Menon

On November 26, four days after Gutti Koya tribals hacked forest range officer (FRO) Ch. Srinivasa Rao to death, forest officials in Telangana made an extraordinary demand which the state government is likely to approve. They wanted firearms to secure the jungle, deal with forest-related crimes and for self-protection. State principal chief conservator of forests (PCCF) R.M. Dobriyal has already raised the pitch on the issue. In a video conference with his officers, the PCCF told the worried force that he was asking for the opening of 30 new forest stations, each with an 18-member team, firearms and patrol vehicles. And this would just be in the first phase.

The Telangana situation already has a precedent; Kerala has set up similar stations to keep tabs on forest land encroachers, prevent smuggling/ poaching and protect the wildlife. Apart from forest stations, the Telangana government is also planning a legislation to amend the existing Forest Act, close the loopholes on punishments meted out (currently many offences have provisions for bail). "The government is committed to the security and protection of forest officials," Dobriyal emphasised to assuage the apprehensions of his officers. He also urged frontline staff, who have been on strike since November 24, to rejoin work immediately, saying their grievances would be addressed.

Srinivasa Rao, the 2021 KVS Babu state gold medal winner for forest protection, was killed when his team was attacked by the Gutti Koya tribals in the Yerrabodu habitation in Kothagudem division of Bhadradri Kothagudem district, bordering Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh while trying to stop them from clearing forest land. Though illegal, tribals do this to take up *podu* (slash-and-burn shift cultivation) where they plant rain-fed crops initially and then shift to paddy and cash crops depending on irrigation sources. "After the attack on a woman FRO in Kagaznagar in 2019, Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao (KCR) had ordered the police to coordinate with forest officials during operations, but it has not been happening," rues M. Raja Ramana Reddy, general secretary, Telangana Forest Officers' Association.

Elsewhere in the state, tribals are up in arms demanding title deeds for lands on which they take up *podu* cultivation. This covers some 3,041 villages across 28 districts. The state is reluctant to grant it, worried that the forest cover would be

The forest officer's murder has got the force agitated while the tribals are up in arms over title deeds to the land

sity, Kota (2013-2015), and AKTU (2015-21), where he did two terms. In fact, Pathak was considered so indispensable that in the past two years he was also given additional charge of two universities, Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Bhasha University, Lucknow (December 2020 to April 2021), and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Agra (January-September 2022).

Despite repeated requests, the offices of CM Yogi Adityanath as well as that of governor Anandiben Patel refused to respond on the issue. Taking action against a sitting V-C is next to impossible without the sanction of either of the two offices, and top sources in the administration say there is some strain between the two over the issue.

Pathak seems to have connections cutting across party lines. A Kanpur native, he became V-C at the age of 40. A source close to him says a Congress leader helped him get his first post in 2009. But after 2014, it's his connections with the BJP that have helped him. In Lucknow, everyone knows about his strong ties with a central minister and another Rajya Sabha member of the ruling party. Even in the Yogi government, a cabinet minister is said to be close to him. Now his political connections are also under the scanner. The source close to Pathak also hinted that the V-C, who has had dealings with many top leaders and bureaucrats over the years, is privy to their secrets, which is perhaps why he has still not been arrested. "Many secrets will tumble out if Pathak is arrested," he says ominously. And so he roams free. ■

FATAL CLASH A Gutti Koya tribal hamlet inside a Telangana forest; (inset) murdered FRO Srinivasa Rao

lost forever. The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, grants *podu* cultivators only a 'right for cultivation' certificate. It does not grant ownership, which is vested with the forest department. This has led to friction between the two sides over the years.

Forest officials suspect that some of the tribals, especially the Gutti Koya, are being egged on by the Maoists. Since 2005, there has been an influx of Gutti Koya from Chhattisgarh, who migrated here after years of persecution at the hands of the Salwa Judum (the state-sponsored militia) and left-wing extremists. This also led to another dimension in the deepening state versus tribal conflict—local communities want the Gutti Koya squatters evicted. After the FRO's murder, furious residents of the Bendalapadu gram panchayat, led by sarpanch P. Venkateswara Rao, have demanded that the state government clear the Yerrabodu habitation and send the Gutti Koya community there back to Chhattisgarh. "They came from the Sukma region and should be sent back at any cost as they do not belong here," says Rao.

Encroachments by migrants and the humanitarian question is a growing challenge for the ruling Telangana Rashtra Samithi. KCR had launched the 'Telangana ku Haritha Haram (A green garland for Telangana)' campaign in 2015, soon after he came to power for the first time. Consistent efforts since then have increased the state's green cover by 7.7 per cent and the forest cover by 6.9 per cent in seven years. Numerous initiatives, many with active people's participation, were launched to achieve afforestation targets and raise green consciousness, including planting of some 200 million seedlings and rejuvenation of 800 million plants in the forests. But the absence of a clear policy on encroachments and resettlement of tribals—if necessary by amending the Recognition of Forest Rights Act—could see all the efforts on the afforestation front come to naught. ■

GLASSHOUSE

NO AMITY IN AMETHI

The word is that **Rahul Gandhi** may contest the 2024 Lok Sabha poll once again from family bastion Amethi, despite the loss in 2019. The ground situation, though, doesn't seem conducive. Recently, Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Brijlal Khabri visited Amethi where, embarrassingly, the district president resigned midway through a meeting, alleging that the state high command and local leaders did not listen to him. Needless to say, Khabri's visit did not end well. What's ironic is that many in the Congress see the situation in Amethi as symptomatic of the 'conflict' in the state between the Rahul camp and that of his sister **Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra**, who is the AICC general secretary in charge of UP.

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

ANI

NON-STOP MODI

The ceaseless campaign for the Gujarat election in November is taking a toll on senior BJP leaders. Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, often perceived to be a mute voice in party affairs, has now, literally, lost his voice. Union home minister Amit Shah had to skip a public rally in Vadodara over the weekend due to bad health resulting from exertion. Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** seems to be the only exception. BJP functionaries wonder how the PM, who is 72, keeps his gruelling schedule in the state. It's called the tireless will to win.

In Ganga's Name

In 2014, when Narendra Modi decided to contest the Lok Sabha polls from Varanasi, he famously quipped: "*Mujhe toh Ma Ganga ne bulaya hai* (Mother Ganga has called me)." With the 2024 general election less than two years away, it's the turn of Bihar chief minister **Nitish Kumar** to invoke the holy river. Projecting him as an alternative to Modi, his supporters cheered him on with slogans like "*Hamara PM kaisa ho, Nitish ji ke jaisa ho* (What should our PM be like, just like Nitish)" when the chief minister launched the Har Ghar Ganga-jal scheme in Rajgir town on November 27. Will Nitish bow to the will of the people and throw his hat in the ring?

HARDIK CHHABRA

Kaushik Deka with Prashant Srivastava, Jumana Shah, Amitabh Srivastava, Amarnath K. Menon and Anilesh S. Mahajan

UPFRONT

Mark Time?

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) general secretary **N. Lokesh** is planning a *padayatra* next year, starting January 27, from Kuppam—his father and party supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu's constituency—to Itchapuram in the northeast corner of coastal Andhra Pradesh. The *padayatra* has worked well as a path to power in Andhra, most notably for CM Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy of the Yuvajana Shramika Rythu Congress (YSRC). But the TDP says this is by way of poll preparations, in case Jagan decides to advance the dates for the assembly polls (the state is due in 2024 along with the general election). Naidu Jr has tried to rope in youth leaders for the march, notably heirs of TDP veterans, but the response has been lukewarm so far.

FOREIGN HAND

Uttarakhand is the latest BJP-ruled state to seek the help of a global consulting firm to guide its growth trajectory. Chief Minister **Pushkar Singh Dhami** has zeroed in on McKinsey to prepare a blueprint for doubling its Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the next five years. The party's paterfamilias, the RSS, may baulk, but it seems that is the road ahead. Earlier in August, Yogi Adityanath-led Uttar Pradesh appointed Deloitte to do a similar job. As one unimpressed RSS ideologue pointed out drily, one needs to be "self-reliant" in developing ideas first before attempting to make the economies "self-reliant".

Japanese premier Fumio Kishida
Indonesian presi-dent Joko Widodo
Australian PM Anthony Albanese
Italian premier Giorgia Meloni
Mexican president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador
German chancellor Olaf Scholz
European Com-mission president Ursula von der Leyen
British PM Rishi Sunak
Russian president Vladimir Putin
Chinese president Xi Jinping
BHADOO SAHIB

COVER STORY

G20

INDIA'S M

AS PRESIDENT OF THE MOST POWERFUL GROUPING OF NATIONS, INDIA CAN PILOT CONSENSUS ON KEY GLOBAL CONCERNS AND EMERGE AS A WORLD LEADER

French president Emmanuel Macron
US president Joe Biden
Brazilian president-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva
Canadian premier Justin Trudeau
Argentinian president Alberto Fernandez
South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol
Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan
Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman
South African president Cyril Ramaphosa
Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India
BHADOO SAHIB

MOMENT

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

Photo-imaging by **AMARJEET SINGH NAGI**

PASSING THE BATON
Indonesian president Joko Widodo hands the gavel to PM Modi in Bali, Nov. 12

ANI

BHADOO SAHIB

The gavel of the G20 (Group of Twenty) presidency that was handed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Bali summit in mid-November may appear diminutive. But the size belies the enormous responsibilities that come with it. On December 1, when India formally assumed charge of the G20, its member-nations represented 60 per cent of the world's population but, more importantly, accounted for 85 per cent of global GDP and 75 per cent of international trade. Since its inception in 1999, the G20 has emerged as the world's most powerful international forum for major economic issues and, recently, for geopolitical concerns too. Coincidentally, India will assume the presidency of the all-powerful United Nations Security Council too in December for a month. It will also be chairing the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), the world's largest regional forum, till September 2023. It is truly India's moment on the world stage.

Yet, the country takes charge of these fora at a torrid time in world affairs, beset with what external affairs minister S. Jaishankar calls the debilitating consequences of the 3Cs: Covid, Conflict and Climate Change. The Covid-19 pandemic gutted economies across the globe, including of the rich nations. Even as the world struggled to recover from the ill effects of the pandemic, the Ukraine war in February saw a dangerous rise in geopolitical tensions in addition to setting off a devastating food and energy crisis. The

> "The onus of creating a new order for the post-Covid period lies on our shoulders. I want to assure you that **India's G20 presidency will be inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented**. Together, we will make G20 a catalyst for global change"
>
> **NARENDRA MODI**
> *Prime Minister of India*

THE G20 PRIMER

Set up in 1999 in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, the Group of 20 includes developed and developing nations. Initially a forum for finance ministers, it was elevated to summit level in 2008 with heads of states as representatives

G20 REPRESENTS

85% OF GLOBAL GDP

4.6 BILLION PEOPLE

OR

75% OF WORLD TRADE

60% OF TOTAL POPULATION

43 heads of states/ governments/ international organisations will participate in the New Delhi summit, the largest ever in G20

DEVELOPED MEMBER-COUNTRIES

UNITED STATES, UNITED KINGDOM, SOUTH KOREA, EUROPEAN UNION, AUSTRALIA

GERMANY, ITALY, FRANCE, CANADA, JAPAN

DEVELOPING MEMBER-COUNTRIES

INDIA, CHINA, SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH AFRICA, ARGENTINA

TURKEY, INDONESIA, MEXICO, BRAZIL, RUSSIA

SPECIAL INVITEES TO THE DELHI SUMMIT

Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain, the UAE

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

UN, IMF, World Bank, WHO, WTO, ILO, FSB, OECD

PAST FIVE G20 SUMMITS: THE BIG TAKEAWAYS

2018: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

Agreement signed to authorise new resources for the IMF as a global financial safety net

2019: OSAKA, JAPAN

G20 leaders reaffirm support for reform of the WTO to improve its functioning

2020: RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

Initiative launched to suspend govt debt repayment for the world's poorest nations

2021: ROME, ITALY

Agreement signed on global minimum taxation for large multinational corporations

2022: BALI, INDONESIA

Leaders' declaration calls for end to war in Ukraine, echoing PM Modi's words–'today's era is not one of war'

Graphics by **TANMOY CHAKRABORTY**

A WHOLE COUNTRY AT WORK

From Srinagar in the north to Thiruvananthapuram in the south and from Rann of Kutch in the west to Kohima in the east, venues are being spruced up, adequate hotel rooms and transport ensured

THE TASK BEFORE INDIA

The country will have a chance to project itself as a global leader that can help carve a consensus on contentious issues

GLOBAL

Taking a leading role in a fragmented world

Leave a lasting legacy

Champion the causes of the developing world

DOMESTIC

Reaffirm India's increasing global heft in the domestic arena

REGIONAL

Push regional interests as South Asia's leader

40 FINANCE TRACK MEETINGS

result? Over 200 million people have lost jobs worldwide and 100 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty. There is also a worrying slowdown in the UN goals for sustainable development and questions of survival confront the Global South. More than 70 countries, including neighbouring Sri Lanka and Pakistan, are battling a severe debt crisis, and the world as a whole is staring at an alarming global economic recession in 2023. In this fragmented and somewhat chaotic post-Covid world, India has been given the opportunity to take the lead in driving a consensus on key global issues, to push for collective action, and also emerge as the champion of the developing world's agenda. In short, become a truly global leader.

NOT JUST A GLOBAL TALKING SHOP

There cannot be a better platform than the G20 to demonstrate that prowess. Set up in 1999 for finance ministers of both developed and key developing nations to sort out the Asian financial crisis, the then US president George W. Bush elevated G20 to a leadership summit level in 2008, when the global financial crisis broke out, broad-basing its agenda to look at both geo-economic and political issues. Though all decisions are taken by consensus and are non-binding, the grouping has been able to shake off the im-

FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

G20 LEADERS

FINANCE MINISTERS & CENTRAL BANK GOVERNORS
8 Workstreams

1. Framework WG
2. Infrastructure WG
3. International Financial Architecture WG
4. Sustainable Finance WG
5. Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion
6. Joint Finance & Health Taskforce
7. International Taxation
8. Finance Sector Issues

SHERPA TRACK
(Headed by Sherpa)
13 working groups (WG)

1. Anti-Corruption
2. Agriculture
3. Culture
4. Development
5. Digital Economy
6. Disaster Risk Reduction
7. Employment
8. Environment & Climate
9. Education
10. Energy Transitions
11. Health
12. Trade and Investment
13. Tourism

12 ENGAGEMENT GROUPS (EG)
Led by civil society groups

1. Business 20
2. Civil 20
3. Labour 20
4. Parliament 20
5. Science 20
6. SAI 20
7. Space 20
8. Start-up 20
9. Think 20
10. Urban 20
11. Women 20
12. Youth 20

FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING
Line ministers' meetings

Pragati Maidan undergoing facelift to host G20 summit

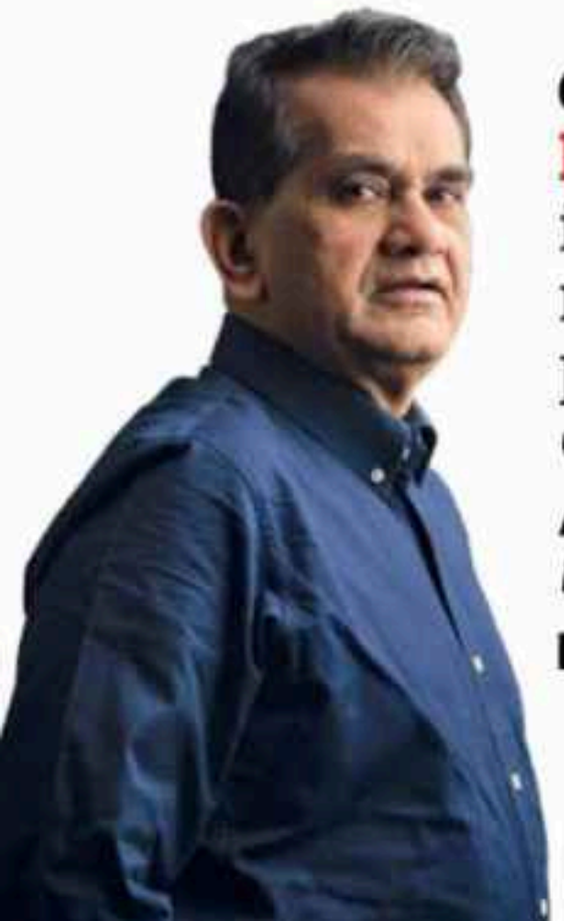
CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

60 SHERPA TRACK MEETINGS

50 EG MEETINGS

15 MINISTERIAL MEETINGS

25 SEMINARS/ WORKSHOPS



> "We will create a **uniquely Indian experience** that is spiritually elevating, mentally rejuvenating, physically invigorating and culturally enriching"

AMITABH KANT
India's G20 Sherpa

pression of being just another global talking shop. It has set the agenda on many key issues and its outcomes have yielded significant results. Among these has been the setting up of a global Financial Stability Board (FSB) in April 2009 and a Basel III package in July 2009 that prescribed stricter capital and liquidity requirements for banks in order to prevent another global financial meltdown. In Bali, in addition to the successful bilateral between US president Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that considerably lowered tensions, the consensus arrived at over the communiqué con-

demning Russia for the Ukraine invasion and pushing for cessation of war and a return to dialogue and diplomacy was seen as a breakthrough.

Modi, who played a significant role in evolving that consensus in Bali, seems determined that India proves itself up to the challenge and wants to leave a lasting legacy during its presidency. At the concluding session of the Bali summit, he told the gathering of leaders, "The onus of creating a new order for the post-Covid period now lies on our shoulders. I want to assure you all that India's G20 presidency will be inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented. Together, we will make G20 a catalyst for global change." If the Indonesian presidency was about 'Recover Together, Recover Stronger', India's theme is 'One Earth, One Family, One Future', which, an official says, reflects how nations need to unite and jointly handle the multiple stresses the world finds itself up against.

The Indian government is pulling out all the stops to make its presidency among the most successful ever. Starting this month and till it passes the gavel to Brazil in December 2023, India will organise over 200 G20 meetings across 56 locations in the country—from Srinagar in the north to Thiruvananthapuram in the south and from the Rann of Kutch in the west to Kohima in the east. All 28 states and eight Union territories have been roped in to organise these meetings, which includes sprucing up venues, ensuring adequate hotel rooms and transport. The G20 meetings are organised along two main tracks—the finance track consisting of eight workstreams that will have 40 meetings, and the other headed by its Sherpa and consisting of 13 working groups that will have 60 meetings. There will be 15 high-level ministerial meetings, including two at the foreign and finance ministers' levels. In addition, there are 12 engagement groups led by civil society organisations in the fields of business, science, gender issues and in what is India's addition—start-ups. They will have 50-odd meetings. In addition, 25 seminars and workshops have been planned (see *Firing on All Cylinders*).

MAKING IT AN 'INCREDIBLE G20'

India intends to leverage these events to reaffirm its global heft in the domestic arena. The convention centre at Pragati Maidan in Delhi is being renovated for the main leaders' summit to be held in September 2023. Traditionally, the summit is held in November, since December 1 is when the successor country takes over the presidency. But pollution levels being extremely high in the capital during that month, the government thought it wise to advance it. The new centre will accommodate over 7,000 delegates, and will have a special floor for the G20 leaders' summit. India is pushing for the largest-

WHAT'S ON THE AGENDA?

India will have to address the following 10 crucial issues during its G20 presidency

AFP

1 UKRAINE WAR

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has triggered a food and energy crisis. At the 2022 G20 summit in Bali, India played a key role in shaping the communique that condemned the war by quoting the UN General Assembly resolution on it. As chair of G20, India now has a bigger role to play in trying for a peace settlement. Even modest success will be a major achievement.

2 A DEBT TRAP

According to the IMF and World Bank, over 80 low- and middle-income group nations face a serious debt crisis, like Pakistan and Sri Lanka in India's neighbourhood. A global recession can

"On the Ukraine war, we need to have the **stamina of a football referee** to keep running from one end to the other"

BALA VENKATESH VARMA
Former ambassador to Russia

worsen the situation. India is pushing the G20 to restructure norms for lending/ borrowing from institutions like the IMF and World Bank to help such nations access funds easily.

3 CLIMATE CRISIS

One highlight from the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh was an agreement to set up a 'loss and damage' fund to compensate nations suffering the worst damage from climate change. Its modalities can be taken forward at G20 working groups on the issue. Another challenge is to attract private firms to fund projects for the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources.

GETTY IMAGES

4 GLOBAL RECESSION

The World Bank has highlighted risks of a global recession in 2023. Central banks have been raising interest rates to deal with inflation, but if these are accompanied by stress in financial markets, global GDP growth could slow to 0.5 per cent. The coming summit can form a global response to this.

5 FOOD SECURITY

Global food price inflation remains high, much of it related to both Russia and Ukraine being major wheat producers. India has been pushing for a revival of millet production, and at the G20 will push hard for countries to switch to this sturdy crop with a lower carbon footprint.

6 ENERGY SECURITY

GETTY IMAGES

The Ukraine war has led to a global energy crisis. During its presidency, India could play a key role in helping to ease it.

7 BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Half the world's population does not have a digital identity. India's inclusive digital revolution through the JAM (Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile) initiative can offer expertise to other nations.

8 GLOBAL VALUE CHAINS

The pandemic exposed the vulnerability of China-dependent global value chains. With the situation remaining the same, what is being conceived is a China Plus One supply chain. India will use the G20 to push its case for being one of the alternative countries in the global supply chain.

9 TAX REFORMS

India will hope to make progress on the levying of corporate taxation as well as fairer distribution of profits and taxing rights for countries where big MNCs operate.

10 VOICE OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH

As president of the G20, India is also in a position to emerge as a voice of the Global South and represent the interests of the nations in this part of the world.

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

ever participation, hoping to have 43 heads of states, governments and international organisations attending, including leaders from nine countries who will be special invitees for the summit. Among them are Bangladesh, the UAE and Nigeria. Amitabh Kant, who is India's Sherpa for G20 and oversees all meetings on behalf of the prime minister, told INDIA TODAY, "Good presidencies deliver on three core pillars. One is the political drive we demonstrate to build consensus and the overarching narrative that emerges. The second is content, to ensure both continuity and change in the agenda, including the introduction of new and innovative ideas. And the third is the administrative logistics, to ensure that this massive gathering of top leaders from every sphere of global human activity is both caring and efficient. With our prime minister at the helm, we are confident of delivering on all three objectives."

A former CEO of the NITI Aayog, Kant is also known for his ability to showcase India as a major tourist destination, with campaigns such as Incredible India and God's Own Country for Kerala to his credit. He now wants to present India's presidency as "an Incredible G20", as an official smilingly put it. Kant and his team have put together what he calls "a uniquely Indian experience which is spiritually elevating,

INCREDIBLE INDIA @ G20

Cultural festivals on the Indian calendar will be dovetailed with G20 events in an attempt to project India's soft power

Festivals of India

GETTY IMAGES

HORNBILL FESTIVAL

Kohima, Nagaland

Dec. 1-10, 2022

SANGAI FESTIVAL

Imphal, Manipur

Dec. 1-10, 2022

KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL

Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

Feb. 20-26, 2023

TATA MUMBAI MARATHON

Tata Mumbai Marathon

Mumbai, Maharashtra

Jan. 15, 2023

Lighting Monuments

Ramappa Temple, Telangana (Unesco World Heritage Site)

Quiz, Essay, Slogan Contests

- With NCERT & NBT
- Pan-India, year-long

INTERNATIONAL SAND ART FESTIVAL

Konark, Odisha: **Dec. 1, 2023**

INTERNATIONAL KITE FESTIVAL

Ahmedabad, Gujarat ▶
Jan. 14, 2023

SURAJKUND INTERNATIONAL CRAFTS MELA

Surajkund, Haryana
Feb. 1-19, 2023 ▼

Beach Cleaning Drives

Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas

Indore, Madhya Pradesh
Jan. 9, 2023

University Outreach

- 75 universities for G20 Public Outreach
- Pan-India, year-long

culturally enriching, mentally rejuvenating and physically invigorating" for the visiting delegates. They will be attending the major festivals of India, be it the kite festival in Ahmedabad, the sand art festival in Konark, the crafts mela in Surajkund, the Hornbill music festival in Kohima and the dance festival in Khajuraho, all of which have been dovetailed with G20 events to project India's soft power. There will also be beach cleaning drives as part of India's Lifestyle for Environment mission to solve the global climate crisis. Projected as the 'mother of democracy', India's efforts in women-led development will be highlighted, while digital hackathons will demonstrate the major strides it has made in digital inclusion and transformation. The pitch extends to the delegates' kits, which will project the arts and crafts of various states, whether it is Bihar's Madhubani art on coffee mugs, Kashmir's Kani work on bottles or Kanjivaram and Gond designs on the bags for the delegates.

NOW FOR THE HARD PART

All this is expected to transform the G20's usually staid meetings into a global spectacle that is enlightening, entertaining and exhilarating. But the key to the success of India's presidency will lie in its ability to navigate the members through a handful of choppy issues and arrive at a constructive consensus that could yield significant results. Foremost among them is the ongoing Ukraine war that has caused worldwide economic disruption, including a food and fuel crisis, in addition to rising inflationary trends. India walks a tightrope on the issue as Russia is a close friend, and has supplied both fuel and fertilisers to India at a reasonable price throughout the crisis. Though the US and Europe have acknowledged India's constraints, they have found themselves grinding their teeth in frustration on several occasions over India's ambiguous stand. But Modi's finely nuanced statement to Russian president Vladimir Putin at his bilateral meeting with him at the SCO summit in Samarkand in September has changed that perception. Modi told Putin that "today is not an era of war" even while reassuring him that the two countries share "an unbreakable friendship". The West has widely appreciated the subtle shift in India's approach. "We made it amply clear that we are not in favour of war and are happy to do anything to contribute towards peace through diplomacy and dialogue," says a senior official.

The G20 communique in Bali saw India deftly finding a way out of the deadlock by quoting the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia for invading Ukraine rather than the G20 doing so directly. It saw even Russia sign on the communique, showing off India in excellent light as a consensus-builder. Bala Venkatesh Varma, a former Indian ambassador to Russia, says, "Indian diplomacy has demonstrated a high level of pragmatism. At Bali, India kept its doors open to everyone who matters on the subject. Then we kept the side channels open with Russia and key players on the western side, something even Indonesia, which was

in the chair, appreciated. If the G20 at Bali had collapsed without a statement, it would have been double the work during our presidency." Now, as chair of the G20, India is moving away from having to take a position to playing a bigger role in trying to reach a peace settlement. Russia, though, seems intent on bringing Ukraine to its knees, conducting debilitating missile strikes on its infrastructure. So, finding ways to de-escalate the situation will be a tough task. However, if India can bring a modicum of settlement during its G20 tenure, it will be a major achievement. Varma's advice: "We need to have the stamina and pace of a football referee to keep running from one end of the ground to the other without tiring. Nobody knows how the war will play out, but it is important for India to be in the game."

DEFUSING THE DEBT BOMB

The other major issue that India will have to preside over is defusing the global debt bomb. According to the World Bank's 2022 annual report, more than 70 low-income countries besides a dozen other middle-income ones face a serious sovereign debt crisis. India does not have far to look—its neighbours Sri Lanka and Pakistan exemplify how this can lead to financial collapse and political instability. With global recession looming, the Bank fears the situation will get even worse. India is pushing for the G20 to develop a financial toolkit to deal with the collective impact of transnational issues such as climate change, public health and migration. One key part of that will be to try and restructure and overhaul the norms for lending and borrowing from international financing institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) to enable countries to access adequate funds to overcome financial stress.

The other is to get private investment to fund projects for global public good for developing countries, including their energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable sources. Private investors will not bite unless they see good returns and feel secure. Experts, therefore, suggest that MDBs set up innovative financing mechanisms such as providing private players loan guarantees in much the same ways as the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) set up by the World Bank does. The agreement to establish a Loss and Damage Fund at the recent COP27 climate change summit at Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt is seen as a major step towards advanced countries compensating developing ones for the damage global warming is causing, as witnessed recently in floods in Pakistan or the major droughts that afflicted many parts of Africa. While participating countries agreed to the fund in principle, the norms and modalities can be evolved at the G20 working groups on climate change and sustainable development, which will be meeting in India.

Implementing what are called the Two-Pillar international tax agreements under the Global Anti-Base Erosion Model Rules prescribed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in October 2021 is another significant issue on which India hopes to make progress. Pillar One is meant to ensure a fairer distribution of profits and taxing rights for many countries, including India, that have giant multinational enterprises (MNEs) like Amazon and Walmart regardless of whether they have a physical presence in the jurisdiction in which they do business. In a complex formula, MNEs with global sales above €20 billion ($20.7 bn) must reallocate 25 per cent of their total profits over a 10 per cent threshold to the market jurisdiction they operate in. This will result in a reallocation of more than $125 billion annually, with developing countries expected to gain more revenue than advanced ones.

ENDING THE TAX HAVENS

Pillar Two looks at tax havens like Ireland, Singapore, Cayman Islands and a dozen others that offer much lower tax rates than most countries. OECD countries have agreed that MNEs with a revenue of above €750 million ($777 mn) will be subjected to a global minimum tax rate of 15 per cent. The global minimum tax agreement is not designed to eliminate tax competition but to put limits. This will see countries, including India, collect around $150 billion in new revenue annually. With G20 endorsing both these decisions, India will during its presidency work towards ironing out the remaining issues concerning them, including signing a multilateral instrument that will pave the way for their implementation. "Initially," says a senior Indian official, "India may get around Rs 4,000 crore, but it is the way forward and will grow with the economy. It will be a major benefit for other developing countries too." The US and other countries, though, may find it difficult to get their respective legislatures to endorse the same, which could delay the process.

As for trade, the pandemic exposed the vulnerability of

SAYING IT WITH ART

From Madhubani on coffee mugs to Kani on water bottles, traditional Indian craft will find representation in G20 memorabilia

KANI
J&K

PATAN PATOLA
Gujarat

CHIKANKARI
Lucknow

MADHUBANI
Bihar

"G20 works with consensus, so **we'll have to work with all partner nations** to take our initiatives forward"

HARSH SHRINGLA
G20's chief coordinator

current global value chains, particularly those dependent on China. The country is in the middle of another crisis, as blank paper protests greet the drastic shutdowns of its major cities, including Shanghai. Since major manufacturers and investors cannot delink from China that easily, what is being contemplated is a China Plus One value chain, in which alternative countries can be identified to build global resilience. India has a major stake in being one of the alternative countries and will use the G20 opportunity to push its case. The country is also pushing for global norms that will enable the employment-intensive micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector more access to funds. And to set up an Open Network for Digital Commerce as India's industries ministry has done to prevent digital commerce monopolies from stifling MSME growth. It will have to tread carefully, though, on issues such as food and energy security. Russia became its largest supplier of oil recently, besides fertilisers. The US and Europe are pushing for a price cap on Russian oil sales in the hope that it will bring down energy prices, especially for developing economies, and also limit the amount of revenue Russia will have at its disposal to wage its war on Ukraine. It's an issue that India will have to navigate with finesse.

With regard to food security, as wheat shipments get disrupted owing to major wheat producers Russia and Ukraine being locked in war, India is pushing for a revival of millet production across the world. Unlike wheat, which requires plenty of water, millets grow in water-scarce regions and were the staple in the Global South till they were supplanted by commercialised wheat production. However, almost 130 countries continue to grow millets, with India being the largest producer, accounting for 20 per cent of the total worldwide production of 89 million tonnes in 2019. In comparison, global wheat production stood at 800 million tonnes this year. India spearheaded a UN resolution last year to declare 2023 as the International Year of Millets, which was passed with the backing of 72 countries. At G20, it will push hard for countries to switch to millet production, helping the climate change cause too in the bargain, highlighting how it has a much lower carbon footprint and water usage than wheat.

DATA AS DEVELOPMENT

Another area where India hopes to play a leading role is in bridging the digital divide. Almost four billion people, or half the world's population, lack a digital identity. Two billion people remain unbanked. And more than 130 of the world's 195 countries still do not have a digital payments system. India can lead by example on how to bring about an inclusive digital revolution. Through its JAM trinity—Jan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhar cards and Mobile networks—the government is able to execute what is probably the world's largest direct benefit transfer in cash for its welfare schemes. Over 400 million people have opened new bank accounts since the Modi government took over, reducing India's total unbanked population by half. Its public sector UPI (Unified Payments Interface) did a record 46.8 billion transactions last year, or 40 per cent of the world's real-time transactions. Says Kant: "We have built the world's best digital public infrastructure model that could be promoted at a global level, especially for developing countries. And we will advocate these solutions during our presidency."

The degree of success India will find in pushing various agendas remains to be seen. Giant card payment corporates such as Mastercard and Visa, for instance, will want a large share of the global pie and will resist India's bid to occupy the digital payments space. India is acutely aware of all these pulls and pressures and the fact that G20 is a norm-setting body, not an implementation one like, say, the UNSC. "The G20 works with consensus," says Harsh Shringla, G20's chief coordinator and a former foreign secretary, "so we will have to work with all our partner nations to take our initiatives forward. Decisions taken at G20 meetings are widely acceptable, given the all-encompassing nature of its membership." India will leave no stone unturned to ensure its year-long presidency enhances its stature as an emerging world power and helps it become the voice of the Global South. ■

SPECIAL REPORT

CONGRESS

GOING AGGRO ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Getting their social media act together, the Congress creates an ecosystem to churn out well-crafted content on the Bharat Jodo Yatra, ruling the charts across platforms

By Kaushik Deka

GREET THE LEADER
Congress faithfuls line up to meet Rahul Gandhi during the Bharat Jodo Yatra in Shirgaon, Maharashtra

On the intervening night of November 7-8, when the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) was crossing over to Maharashtra from Telangana, Congress social media chairperson Supriya Shrinate, who was camping in Himachal Pradesh for the assembly election campaign, was wide awake well past midnight. The former journalist is no stranger to a nocturnal routine, but for the rest of her team stationed at Delhi's 15, Gurudwara Rakabganj Road (GRB), the night was pregnant with anticipation. They had been alerted about some captivating visuals that would arrive from the Telangana-Maharashtra border. Eventually, those dramatic videos of Rahul Gandhi-led BJY yatris entering Maharashtra at night, the blazing *mashals* (torches) in their hands breaching the engulfing darkness, landed at their work stations.

After some quick editing, a few WhatsApp exchanges between Shrinate and Srivatsa Y.B., who looks after the social media accounts of Rahul Gandhi, and a go-ahead from Jairam Ramesh, AICC general secretary in-charge of communications, Congress social media handles across various digital platforms came abuzz with images of Rahul Gandhi's night march in the homeland of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. By the time

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THE PARTY'S SOCIAL MEDIA WARRIORS

JAIRAM RAMESH, 68,
Rajya Sabha MP, AICC General Secretary in-charge Communications

Unlike previous communication heads, Ramesh oversees the party's social media wing. He decides the larger framework of social media content. His social media credo: ACT (Aggressive, Cohesive and Timely). He heads a team of eight people

SUPRIYA SHRINATE, 45,
AICC Chairperson, Social Media and Digital Platforms

The journalist-turned-politician leads a team of around 60 members who are engaged in running the party's social media campaign across all platforms. Average age of the team is 27. They operate from 15, Gurudwara Rakabganj Road in Delhi

SRIVATSA Y.B., 39,
Head, Rahul Gandhi's social media team

The Gandhi scion's social media campaign is handled by a team of 10 headed by Srivatsa Y.B., a former MNC executive. He was earlier the social media head of the Karnataka Congress. Srivatsa's team works in coordination with Ramesh and Shrinate's teams

Teen Bandar

The Mumbai-based digital outreach company has been **hired to help the Congress social media team during the Bharat Jodo Yatra**. It has designed the logo, composed the yatra's anthem and manages its website. Teen Bandar is run by Prashant Chari and Savio Joseph

the members of the GRB war room left for home, it was 3.30 am. The next batch was set to take over at 6 am.

This was just another day in the lives of the Congress social media warriors, particularly after the BJY began on September 7. The yatra—a nearly six-month-long foot march from Kanyakumari to Kashmir, covering nearly 3,500 km—is unprecedented in terms of scale and outreach in the post-Independence history of the country. Every day, it generates moments not seen during political events such as election rallies—men and women of all age groups and social strata walking alongside Rahul Gandhi, the face of the Congress, holding his hand, embracing him, even weeping on his shoulder.

Then there is the spectacle of Rahul breaking into a sprint with veteran leaders, matching steps with a dance group, peeling off sugarcane with his teeth or addressing a crowd amidst the pouring rain. Actors, sportspersons, war heroes and social activists—while emphasising their non-partisan stand—have volunteered to join the yatra because they say they believe in the message of unity and love. "Celebrities reached out because they felt the need to speak out against the hate and communal divide gripping the country," says a senior leader associated with organising the BJY. "Rahul Gandhi will reach out to a larger base of people with powerful social voices, inviting them to walk with him."

While the yatra has created a buzz in every state it has crossed—if only for its scale and novelty—it's the social media team which has the demanding task of beaming the BJY's "uniqueness and objective" to millions of mobile handsets, desktops and laptops across India. And that's what three central teams, supported by an external agency, have been doing relentlessly since September 7. Leading the teams is Jairam, who has coined a new credo for the social media wing—ACT (aggressive, cohesive and timely). Separate from the Congress's communication department earlier, the wing has now been put under the supervision of Jairam, who took charge as the communications in-charge in June. "This has brought cohesion and timeliness to the social media unit. With aggression added to the mix, we are getting wonderful results," says Jairam, who has an eight-member team reporting directly to him, in addition to the Shrinate-led 60-member team.

The newfound aggression is visible in the Congress taking on rivals on social media platforms, post by post, troll by troll, on occasion forcing the adversary to retreat. When some BJP leaders, including former Union minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, allegedly posted a fake visual of Rahul in which he was supposedly forgiving the two Muslim assailants who killed Kanhaiya Lal, a Hindu tailor in Udaipur, the Congress publicly named and shamed those who posted the video and forced them to delete the same. Lal had expressed support for BJP leader Nupur Sharma who was suspended for her offensive remarks on the Prophet.

And if counterstrike on social media is not enough, the party is quick to resort to legal recourse, filing defamation cases. If the BJP criticised Rahul's photographs with children during the yatra, alleging political use of children, the Congress responded by writing to the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights and the Election Commission about the alleged use of children for campaigning in Gujarat by PM Narendra Modi. The complaint

WHO IS THE MASTER OF TWEETS?

PM Narendra Modi has nearly four times more followers than Rahul Gandhi. Yet the Congress leader gets more engagements from his tweets than those by the PM

NARENDRA MODI
84.5 million

▶ Nov. 1, 2022 - Nov. 21, 2022
214 591 4,419 19,051

▶ Jan. 1, 2019 - Dec. 31, 2021
9,477 33,801*

RAHUL GANDHI
22.1 million

▶ Nov. 1, 2022 - Nov. 21, 2022
55 1,149 8,364 26,788

▶ Jan. 1, 2019 - Dec. 31, 2021
1,835 57,618*

Followers · No. of tweets posted · Average comments · Average retweets · Average likes · Engagements*

Note: Only tweets in English and Hindi are considered. Retweets by the two leaders are not counted

* Sum of retweets, likes and quotes. Includes only tweets they posted, and excluded retweets (or tweets generated by others); *Source: Social Media and Political Leaders: An Exploratory Analysis by Shamika Ravi and Mudit Kapoor*

RAHUL GANDHI VS OTHERS

On multiple social media platforms, four BJP leaders and Arvind Kejriwal have more followers than Rahul. On YouTube, he is next to PM Modi

NARENDRA MODI
84.5 · 47 · 71.1 · 13.3

AMIT SHAH
31.3 · 15 · 4.8 · 0.07

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
26.7 · 9.2 · 1.6 · 0.4

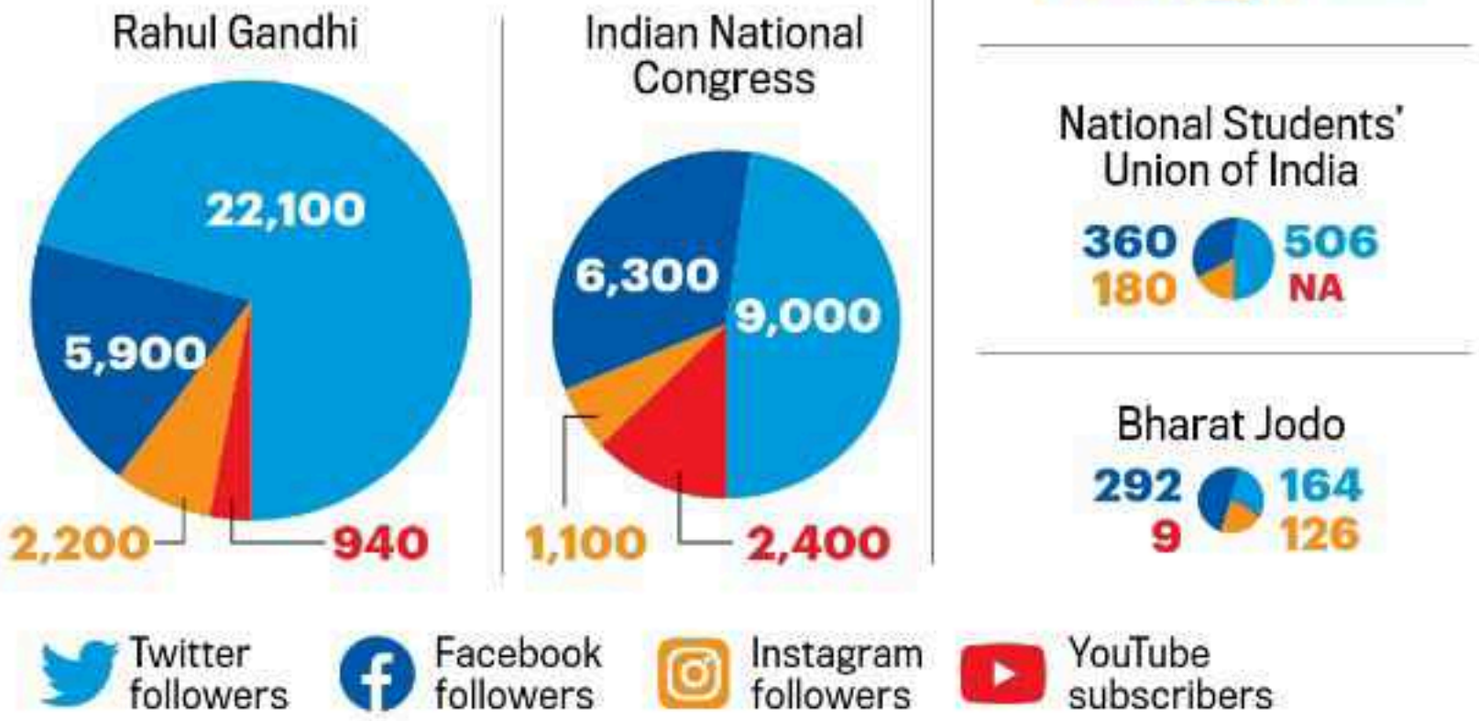
RAJNATH SINGH
23.1 · 7 · 1.2 · 0.04

YOGI ADITYANATH
22.7 · 7.3 · 3.7 · NA

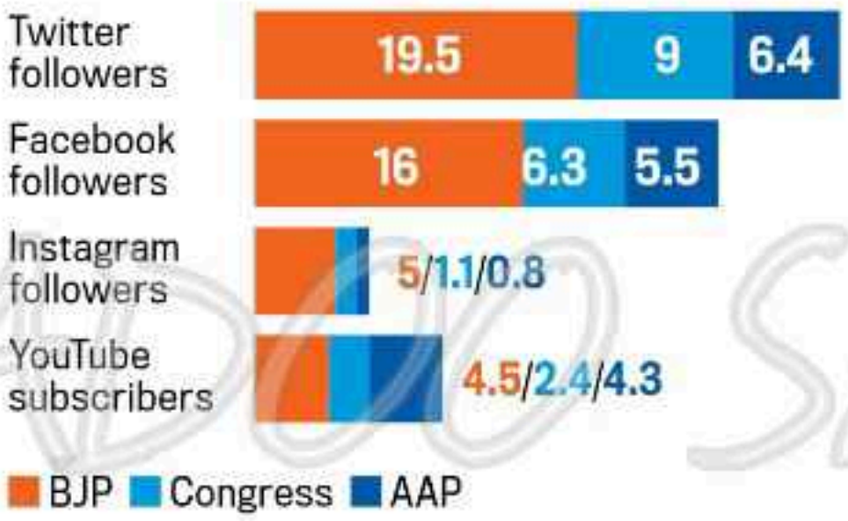
RAHUL GANDHI
22.1 · 5.9 · 2.2 · 0.9

NB: These leaders are compared because they have the highest social media followers across all parties in India. All figures in millions

THE SOCIAL MEDIA UNIVERSE OF CONGRESS



CONGRESS VS OTHER PARTIES



NB: These three parties have highest social media following

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

was filed after the PM shared a video of a girl seated with him who spoke in Gujarati about the BJP's governance. "We cannot be perennially at the receiving end of a vicious troll campaign. We will stick to facts.... We will not stoop to name-calling. But if they continue doing all this, they should be prepared for the same treatment. If they stop spreading fake news and name-calling, we will ensure that no one from our side indulges in it. That's the underlying principle we work with," says Shrinate.

Rahul Gandhi's personal involvement has also strengthened his party's social media campaign. Aided by the 10-member team led by Srivatsa, Rahul personally handles his social media accounts. That's the reason why, as a close aide claims, his posts are much less in number than those of PM Modi. For instance, between November 1 and November 21, Rahul posted only 55 tweets as against Modi's 214. "He is busy in BJY, and he can post only during breaks. That's why his frequency is less," reveals the aide, saying Rahul takes an active part in visualising and curating the content. In fact, the idea of posting videos of his informal interaction with party workers or drone shots of the yatra came from Rahul himself. "He wants the focus to be on people's participation and responses," the aide adds.

THE CONGRESS HAS BEEN TAKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERSARIES AGGRESSIVELY, FORCING THEM TO RETREAT, AND EVEN TAKING THEM TO COURT

People's engagement with and responses to Rahul's social media posts have certainly increased, particularly in comparison to PM Modi. An examination by INDIA TODAY found that between November 1 and 21, his tweets had almost double the number of engagements than those by Modi (*see box*). This despite the fact that Modi has nearly four times the number of followers. Another study by the Delhi-based Observer Research Foundation between January 1, 2019, and December 31, 2021, also found that engagements on Rahul's tweets were higher than Modi's. "Though we have not examined the latest data, the traction on video-centric platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube has seen an unprecedented swing, particularly after BJY," says a Rahul aide.

For maximum amplification of content generated from the yatra, "gentle instructions" were sent to senior leaders to promote such content. "We prepared a report on the year-long social media activities of 33 leaders and confronted them with it. They rarely amplified anything posted by Rahul Gandhi or the official INC handle. Now they have become active and aggressive," says a member of the communications team.

For additional support, in terms of professional hands and on-ground content generation, the party has hired Mumbai-based digital media outreach agency Teen Bandar. Apart from designing the logo and composing the BJY anthem, it maintains the website dedicated to the yatra. "Our permanent inhouse teams are small. For a massive exercise like BJY, we needed additional skilled manpower. Teen Bandar fulfils that requirement. It has no editorial say," says Jairam.

ANI

TARGET PRACTICE
Rahul Gandhi with Priyanka Gandhi -Vadra during the Yatra in Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh

The three inhouse teams—led by Jairam, Shrinate and Srivatsa—are supported by a large number of volunteers and party workers who are generating content themselves. "I have never seen such euphoria among workers in my entire political career," says Kamal Nath, former Madhya Pradesh CM, and nine-time Lok Sabha MP. "The BJY has infused a different kind of energy into the organisation." One such worker's mobile phone provided one of the most viral images during the yatra—on October 6, in Karnataka, Rahul Gandhi bent down to tie his mother Sonia Gandhi's shoelaces, as she was walking with him. "There was no still camera around and it happened suddenly. We got the image from a grassroots worker," says Shrinate, who feels such sunshine moments cannot be planned. "Rahul Gandhi doesn't do things for the camera. But he does things like embracing an old lady or listening to a farmer out of genuine affection and sincerity. The challenge for those on the ground is to capture the moment. Nobody knows when that will happen. But because it happens spontaneously, we get the most inspiring and emotive images."

But to get such content, Shrinate's team has to sift through a large volume of images and videos every day and edit and package them to meet the requirements of different social media platforms. While they do that for the Congress's social media handles, including the one for BJY, the team led by Srivatsa curates content for Rahul's personal social media handle. There is regular coordination among the three teams about what has the potential to go viral and what is suitable for which social media platform. Not everything on the yatra is posted on INC social media handles, while the BJY handle focuses on yatra-related content.

It's no easy task for the three teams that total not even 80 members. Constantly supplied with an enormous volume of videos and visuals, they have to suitably repackage them, often in less than 30 minutes. At times, the supply chain is blocked, for the yatra passes through places with poor connectivity. Jammers—part of Rahul's security requirements—add barriers too. "Amid these challenges, the teams are constantly looking out for the right content. My barometer to pick the right content is how the team is reacting to the visuals. For instance, when Rohith Vemula's mother walked with Rahul Gandhi or Gauri Lankesh's mother and sister joined him, there were moist eyes in the room. Those were such poignant moments. These moments are making BJY so special and humane. It has gone beyond political messaging and touched people's hearts," says Shrinate.

RAHUL'S CANDID MOMENTS APART, MUCH OF BJY'S SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION IS PLANNED IN ADVANCE TO SET THE TONE AND NARRATIVE

But Rahul's spontaneity is not the only driving force behind BJY's social media promotion. Much of it is also planned and packaged in advance to set the tone and narrative. For instance, when Rahul was in Vidarbha, he talked about farmers' suicides in a press conference. Even before the event, the social media team in GRB was ready with backgrounders and graphics on farmers' suicides so that the posts gave viewers a context—why farmers' suicides is an important issue in Vidarbha. When Rahul interacted with MNREGA workers in Thiruvananthapuram, the team was ready with numbers related to the scheme to add context to his demand for making it relevant for the next generation.

Then there are late discoveries. For instance, in Karnataka, Rahul noticed an old woman standing with two cucumbers in her hand and, out of curiosity, struck up a conversation with her. The photograph of him with his hands around her shoulders came to the social media team. It was assumed to be just another old lady showering affection on the Gandhi scion. Later, they came to know that the conversation had a historical significance—the lady had grown the two cucumbers on land allocated to her under the 'Grower's Land Policy' when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister. She wanted to gift the cucumbers to Indira's grandson. No time was lost to repackage the visual with the emotional context.

Indeed, context has been critical for the Congress's social media warriors. For them, the BJY is history in the making and they are its ardent memory-keepers. "We did not anticipate its scale, but now it's unfolding as a watershed moment in the nation's political history," says Shrinate. The party's social media teams are trying their best to convince the nation to see the BJY through their historical prism. ■

DEFENCE | LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL

FORTIFYING THE BORDER

NEW DELHI HAS DOUBLED THE PACE OF BUILDING STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE ALONG THE HIMALAYAN BORDER TO MATCH CHINA'S AGGRESSIVE PUSH IN THE REGION

By Pradip R. Sagar

BURROWING DEEP
The under construction Sela tunnel near Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, situated at an altitude of 13,000 feet

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Years before tension along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh spiralled into a crisis in April 2020, leading to a protracted face-off between the Indian Army and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China, it was widely acknowledged that the Chinese were building infrastructure at a fast pace to enable men and materiel to be deployed on border areas in the shortest possible time. Indian reaction to Chinese activity on the LAC as well as along the McMahon Line in the Northeast was slow, but picked up pace after 2014, as the NDA government took multiple measures to improve infrastructure. Thus, from 2008 to 2014, 7,270 metres of bridges were built, while 14,450 metres were completed between 2014 and 2020. Similarly, between 2008 and 2014, 3,610 km of border roads were constructed, while the corresponding figure for 2014 to 2020 was 4,764 km. The Indian military believes that improved connectivity to forward areas of the LAC has allowed Indian army patrols to be more thorough, and is directly responsible for frequent skirmishes with the PLA in recent years. "Road construction on the Indian side of the LAC always triggers crises, because of accessibility to Indian patrols. And it always annoys the Chinese military," says former Northern Army commander Lt Gen (retd) D.S. Hooda. Indeed, in May 2020, one apparent reason for the PLA's sudden hostility was India's scaling up of the 255-km high-altitude Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DS-DBO) road, that connects Leh to the Karakoram pass—a sensitive matter for China. With the tocsin of the stand-off still ringing, infrastructure construction on the border with China has received a fresh impetus. Having learnt bitter lessons from the past, the military's emphasis is now on building roads, habitat, bridges, helipads and airstrips to match the Chinese. China, too, is not letting up on further sharpening their own advanced preparedness.

On November 12, two days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi left for Indonesia to attend the G20 summit, New Delhi issued a gazette notification for the construction of the 1,800 km-long Frontier Highway in Arunachal Pradesh. Named National Highway 913, it will follow the McMahon Line—the India-China border in the Northeast disputed by the latter—and will connect the China-Bhutan-India border tri-junction to Vijaynagar via Tawang, Upper Subansari, Siang, Dibang Valley and Kibithu. The government said the highway will safeguard the border, control migration from border areas and improve the tourism infrastructure. The cost is estimated at Rs 27,349 crore and it is expected to take three years to complete. Militarily, it is intended to neutralise China's aggressive posturing in the area and give an unprecedented advantage to the Indian Army in terms of response time, accessibility, logistics and reach. Furthermore, the Frontier Highway connects all the river valleys and enables army units to easily move from one valley to another.

Another road, also under construction, will provide alternative connectivity to western Ladakh and the Zanskar Valley from the Manali axis in Himachal Pradesh. Two-thirds of the work on the 298 km-long double-lane road has been completed. The 4.1 km twin-tube, all-weather Shinkun La tunnel, also on the Himachal Pradesh-Ladakh route, is on track after a green signal from the ministry of defence. The strategically important DS-DBO road, that provides access to high-altitude airfields and military posts, is also getting over 35 'Class -70' upgraded bridges. These are permanent, extra-wide bailey bridges that can bear a load of 70 tonnes—T90 tanks and infantry combat vehicles, for example—and are expected to be completed by 2023. Recently, the army successfully conducted trials for constructing assault bridges—high-mobility vehicle-

IN STEP WITH THE DRAGON'S MOVES

CHINA, WITH ITS FIRST MOVER ADVANTAGE, IS BEEFING UP ITS BORDER ASSETS. INDIA HAS MADE TREMENDOUS PROGRESS IN THE PAST DECADE

Text by **PRADIP R. SAGAR** | *Graphic by* **TANMOY CHAKRABORTY**

Hanuthang-Handanbroke-Zungpal-Turtuk road between the Indus and the Shyok valleys

INDIAN SIDE

Nyoma airfield is upgraded

Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) & Fukche airfields are operational

Chisumle-Demchok Road: world's highest motorable road

Hotan
Xaidulla
Tianshuihai
DBO
Turtuk
Hanuthang
Nyoma
Fukche
Demchok
Shiquanhe
Gar Gunsa
Manali
Leh
Shinkun La
Manali
Domar

4.1 km twin tube Shinkun La tunnel, connecting Himachal Pradesh to Ladakh

Nine new tunnels are under construction

298 km-long Western Ladakh and Zanskar Valley directly from the Manali axis

BRO constructed 3,595 km of roads, primarily along the Line of Actual Control with China

Rs 12,000 crore **Char Dham highway project** to connect the shrines of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath in Uttarakhand will have roads to LAC

Strategic 2.5 km-long Sela tunnel near Tawang at an altitude of 13,000 feet

Frontier Highway in Arunachal Pradesh to connect China-Bhutan-India border tri-junction to Vijaynagar via Tawang, Upper Subansari, Siang, Dibang Valley and Kibithu

CHINESE SIDE
DBO
DBO Road
AKSAI CHIN
LADAKH
Leh
Durbuk
Shyok
Chushul
Chumar
Demchok
Shiquanhe
China National Highway 219
PLA has built at least eight roads towards the LAC from China's G219, including a road connecting Sirijap at Finger 8 on the north bank of the Pangong Tso lake to the G219 highway
Road connecting Rutog County in Tibet to the Spanggur lake south of Pangong Tso
Road from the south of Shiquanhe to Chumar in Ladakh
Air bases in Kashgar, Gar Gunsa and Hotan
Heliports in Xaidulla, Tianshuihai, Shiquanhe and Domar regions
Lhasa
Nyingchi
Vijaynagar
Tawang
China has constructed a cluster of at least 60 buildings inside Arunachal Pradesh
PLA's 52nd and 53rd Mountain Infantry Brigades are based in the larger Nyingchi Prefecture. The 1,600 km-long Sichuan-Tibet rail line will link Lhasa on the Tibetan Plateau with Chengdu in central Sichuan
China bullet train connecting Lhasa with Nyingchi, which is a border town opposite Mechukha in Arunachal

based, multi-span mobile bridging systems—in high altitude areas for the first time. With projects like these, the Indian military has improved its battle readiness along the border with China, where essential items such as arms, ammunition and food have to be transported up in bulk before winter, with its sub-zero temperatures, sets in. As the situation on the Himalayan frontier turns 'stable' but 'unpredictable' according to military experts, there is very little choice but to up one's game. Military planners claim rapid infrastructure development has enhanced the Indian military's capability—for example, a majority of the army's company-level posts are now connected to roads.

Multiple standoffs along the LAC have certainly injected an urgency in the building and bulking up of border infrastructure. In December 2021, defence minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated three roads and 24 bridges, mostly built for faster access to the LAC. Ladakh's Chisumle-Demchok Road is today the world's highest motorable road. The 52 km-long road passes through the Umling La pass at an altitude of 19,000 feet, connecting the towns in the Chumar sector of Eastern Ladakh, directly connecting Chisumle and Demchok with Leh as well as the Nyoma and Karu military stations. Nine new tunnels are also under construction in the area, including the strategic 2.5-km-long Sela tunnel near Tawang at an altitude of 13,000 feet, which will be the highest bi-lane tunnel in the world once completed.

The lion's share of the work on the China border is undertaken by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), the agency under the defence ministry. In the past five years, BRO has constructed 3,595 km of roads, primarily along the LAC, to facilitate all-weather access to forward areas at an overall cost of Rs 20,767 crore. In a reply to Parliament in the previous session, the MoD stated that 2,089 km of roads were constructed along the China border at a cost of Rs 15,477 crore.

Moreover, the Rs 12,000 crore Char Dham highway project that aims to connect four Hindu shrines—Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath—in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand will also bolster connectivity to the LAC. The defence ministry wants to construct connecting links from army and Indo-Tibetan Border Police stations located in Joshimath, Uttarkashi, Roorkee, Rajwala, Dehradun, Tanakpur, Pithoragarh and other places on the proposed highway to the LAC.

Besides creating modern habitat in the past two years to accommodate 22,000 troops, the Indian military has set up 20 Solar Heated Insulated Ladakhi

shelters (SHILA) to combat the harsh winter conditions. In addition, about 450 technical storages were built to house armoured vehicles and weaponry systems and protect them from the intense cold.

CHINESE ADVANCES

Much of India's frenetic activity along the LAC and in the Northeast is in response to China's infrastructural advances in its Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), including an extensive rail network and roads spanning over 60,000 km. Last year, China launched a bullet train connecting Lhasa with Nyingchi, a town opposite India's Tuting sector in the Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh, and only 40 kms away from the border. PLA's 52nd and 53rd mountain infantry brigades are based in the larger Nyingchi Prefecture. Further north, the 1,600 km-long Sichuan-Tibet rail line will link Lhasa on the Tibetan Plateau with Chengdu in central Sichuan. Military observers claim that the total road network in Tibet has increased from 7,300 km in 1959 to 118,800 km in 2021—an astounding expansion of 4.93 km a day.

The PLA has built at least eight roads towards the LAC from China's G219 highway, including one connecting it with Sirijap at Finger 8 on the Pangong Tso lake. In addition, a highway connects Rutog County in TAR to Spanggur lake south of Pangong Tso. Another road runs from the south of Shiquanhe in Tibet's Ngari prefecture to Chumar in eastern Ladakh. These new roads will ensure that China will have direct road connectivity to areas opposite important Indian military posts along the LAC, from DBO in the north to the Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso and Chumar in the south.

Experts feel that steady improvements in Chinese infrastructure are indicative of intentions to maintain an entrenched presence, and suggest that the continuing disengagement process has its limits, particularly in the absence of a substantive change in China's posture. US Army Pacific Command's General Charles A. Flynn, during his visit to New Delhi in June this year, had said that "some of the infrastructure being created in the Western Theatre Command is alarming".

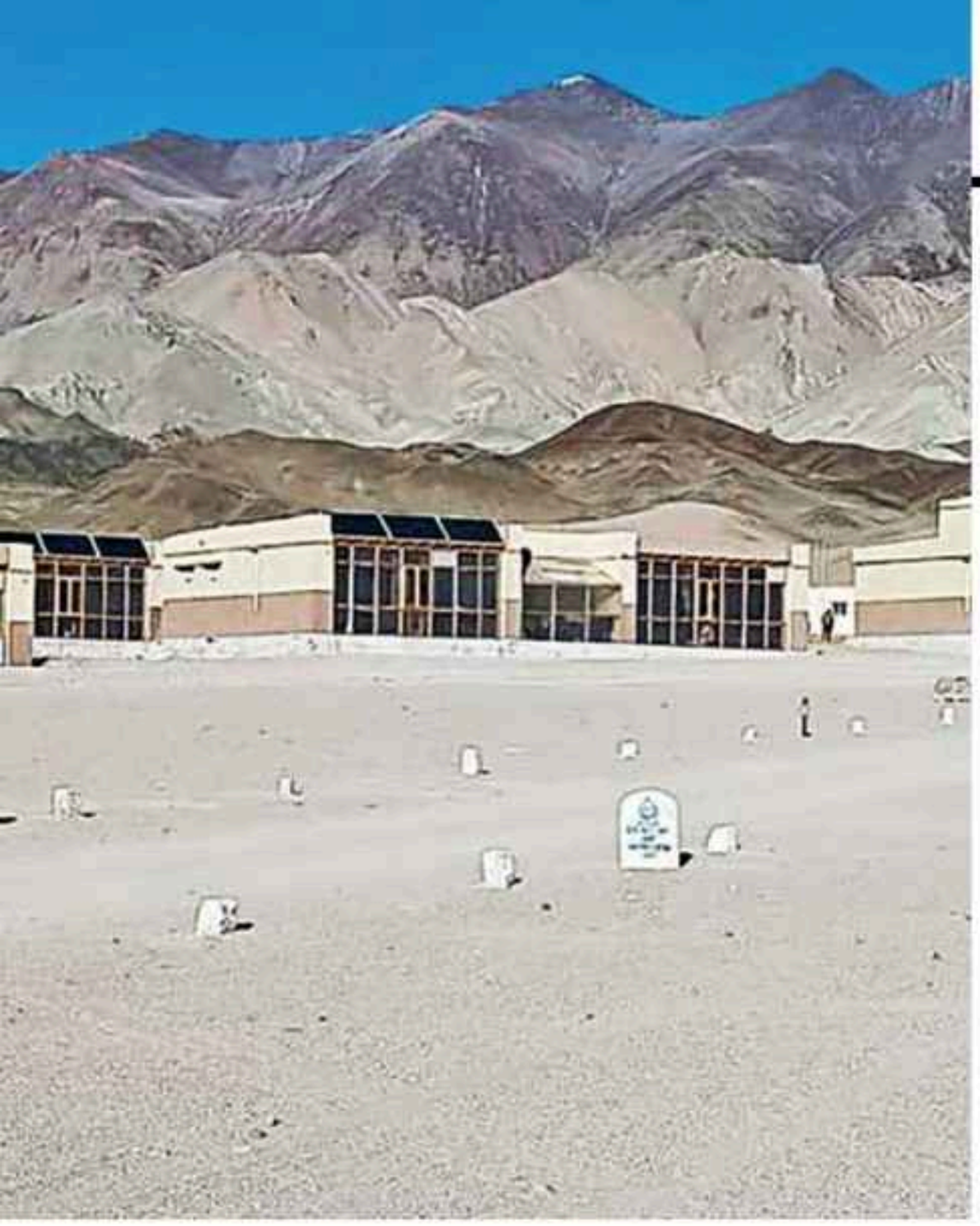
SLOW AWAKENING

Now that the military and the Centre realise the full import of China's activity, funds are being allocated at a much faster pace to develop roads, airfields and helipads, notes Lt Gen. Hooda. "We always lagged behind in infrastructure development along the LAC, so at least some gaps are now getting filled up. Terrain in the Tibet plateau gives an advantage to PLA, but our weaknesses are being remedied slowly," he says. With a large number of troops being deployed at the LAC, which is no longer a peaceful border, better infrastructure is a must to keep them supplied and in a fighting fit condition, he adds.

Flawed strategic decisions of the past are also to blame for the slow pace of Indian infrastructure development. For years, Indian policymakers neglected the China border because of a misguided strategy that believed that the primitive state of infrastructure on the Indian side "would be a deterrent to enemies". Thus, road connectivity was deliberately neglected. Former defence minister A.K. Antony had accepted this to be an "incorrect approach" and declared a "turnaround in government policy" to build/ upgrade infrastructure. However, it was under the Modi government that development accelerated, with the BRO's budget increasing steadily. From 2008 to 2016, it hovered between Rs 3,300 crore and Rs 4,600 crore, but shot up to Rs 8,050 crore in the 2018-19 Union budget.

For years, India neglected the China border because of a flawed strategy that poor infrastructure "would be a deterrent to enemies"

Early on during the face-off between the Indian Army and the PLA in Ladakh, in May 2020, the Union government had accepted and implemented the recommendations of the committee of experts headed by Lt Gen. D.B. Shekatkar (retd) on border infrastructure. These were related to speeding up road construction, for socio-economic development in border areas. Introduction of modern construction plants and machinery was given importance, for which the expert panel recommended increased powers to the BRO to procure them. Since construction of infrastructure on the



ROOMS ON THE WORLD'S ROOF
Left, modern habitat for Indian Army troops in Ladakh; below, the world's highest motorable pass, Umling La, on the Chisumle-Demchok road

PIB

In response to Chinese border villages, under India's 'vibrant villages' programme, people living along the border are to be considered strategic assets, and persuaded not to relocate to cities

high-altitude, rugged terrain along the LAC is, quite literally, an uphill task, the introduction of modern equipment like hot-mix plants for speedier laying of roads, remotely operated hydraulic rock drills for hard rock cutting, precision blasting technology, geo-textiles for soil stabilisation and a range of self-propelled snow-cutters/blowers for swifter clearance of snow were considered paramount, and are now part of the BRO's expanding toolbox.

Senior military analyst Maj. Gen. Shashi Asthana (retd) says that China started infrastructure development along the LAC long ago, to gain a substantial lead over India, and has extended its roads, all connected to well-developed highways in the hinterland, right up to the border. The terrain also favours China, as it is much craggier on the Indian side. On this side of the LAC, explains Asthana, the ridges and valleys are not interconnected, leading to difficulties in movement and construction. "Terrain advantage put the Chinese military way ahead of us. There is a lot being done, but we still have to catch up with them. We are still not at par with the Chinese military on border infrastructure," adds Maj. Gen. Asthana.

Moreover, Chinese border defence law favours their agencies involved in development unlike in India, where environmental and other clearances are needed before work can start. Some military planners have even suggested converting about a 100 km area on the border into a 'strategic area' where no clearance is required to initiate infrastructural works. For better efficiency, the government is in the process of creating a dedicated agency for the management of infrastructure along India's borders. The Border Infrastructure Management Authority (BIMA) will be responsible for the development of road, rail, water, power and communications infrastructure along India's borders, including the LAC.

To counter China's plan to build 624 villages in border areas, India has firmed up plans to set up 'vibrant villages' along the LAC, a concept approved in the previous Union budget. Under this, people living in border areas will be considered strategic assets and the programme seeks to prevent them from relocating to areas nearer cities.

Whether consolidating one's border through its human assets or creating durable infrastructure that can support the thousands of troops deployed along the LAC and in Arunachal Pradesh, the Indian military is inching towards gaining some sort of parity with a hyperactive adversary lying in wait. Hopefully, the steady accretion of development will stand it in good stead. ■

BRINGING BACK THE BUSTARD

The Great Indian Bustard, once a contender for national bird status, is now critically endangered. Can the captive breeding programme in Rajasthan reverse the tide?

BY ROHIT PARIHAR

Two temperature-regulated shelter homes in Rajasthan, some 170 km apart—one near the famous dunes of Sam and the other next to Pokhran—house 23 chicks of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB). They have never seen the outside world and will never be released. Scientists have hatched them from eggs in captivity and will wait for them to breed. The chicks of the 'founder population', as they are called, will then be released into the wild. For the woefully endangered GIB, it's a matter of life and death, and a lot hinges on the success of this project.

The GIB, which decades ago had been in the running to be India's national bird, today seems to be fighting a losing battle. Listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and accorded the highest protection under India's Wild Life (Protection) Act, it has lost over 90 per cent of its natural range. Only about 150 GIBs are left globally, and all are in India. Of them, most are in and around the Desert National Park near Jaisalmer, the only breeding habitat, with Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra now accounting for less than 10 birds each. So far, efforts at conservation have been a sombre journey, punctuated by optimism and perseverance but also roadblocks and disappointment. The captive breeding project may be a silver lining against this experience, but it's not without challenges.

Launched in 2019, the project is at a critical stage. Two chicks have died within a month, taking the number of deaths to six since the programme began. Scientists are also struggling to take care of the nine youngest birds from the previous breeding season that were recently shifted, one by one, from the makeshift centre in Sam to a permanent facility in Ramdeora, Pokhran, and 14 sub-adults that are expected to lay eggs in around two years. Nonetheless, scientists remain optimistic. "The mortality [of the young chicks] is within the level experienced at conservation breeding centres for other bustard species across the world," says Sutirtha Dutta, a scientist at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, who has been supervising the captive breeding programme.

A joint effort of the Rajasthan government, the WII, the Centre and the International Fund for Houbara Conservation (IFHC), Abu Dhabi (which has successfully bred and released the Houbara, a species similar to the GIB, into the wild), the project aims to have a 'founder population' of 30 birds. "The population maintained in captivity is an insurance against extinction and their chicks will be subsequently released back into the wild after threats to their survival are mitigated," says Arindam Tomar, the chief wildlife warden of Rajasthan. So far, 31 eggs have been collected from the wild, of which 29 were incubated and hatched artificially. Only 23 birds hatched in this experiment have survived so far. Of concern is the fact that the populations outside Rajasthan are likely to become extinct soon as they are not viable and the eggs being laid in Andhra Pradesh are non-fertile.

Collecting eggs is no walk in the park. The GIB lays only one egg in a year of good monsoon, or two in rare cases. Experts track the female and wait for it to breed before taking away the eggs. Timely removal often induces a female to lay another one. So, trackers in Jaisalmer have been collecting about half the eggs they spot, without risk-

IN DIRE STRAITS
Three Great Indian Bustard chicks at the Ramdeora captive breeding centre

ing any adverse effects on breeding in the wild, and shifting the eggs to the Sam hatchery.

It took the government five years to study breeding programmes and rope in international experts before signing a memorandum of understanding in 2018. The political wrangling around setting up a breeding centre was perhaps telling of the laxity among authorities. Initially, Kutch in Gujarat, with its moderate climate, mild temperature and higher rainfall being conducive to fertility, had been identified as the best site to set up a national breeding centre. But the state didn't have enough wild GIBs for a founding population, which meant that the only other source, Rajasthan, would have had to provide the eggs. But that didn't work out. Finally, scientists found an ideal location at Sorsan in Kota, but it took two years to finalise an MoU between Rajasthan, the Centre and the WII. A piece of land was allocated in Sorsan in 2019, but the project didn't take off as many didn't want mining activities in nearby areas to cease. So, a temporary hatchery was set up in Jaisalmer till the government established the permanent one at Ramdeora.

WHAT SETS THEM APART

HEIGHT	WEIGHT	WING SPAN
Up to 1.2 m	Up to 15 kg	Up to 2.5 m

- Normally fly 5-20 m high, but can reach 100 m for longer flights.
- Has a wide sideways vision to maximise predator detection, but a narrow frontal vision.
- Females usually deliver just one egg a year. The eggs are laid on the open ground, and face risks from feral animals.
- It is one of the heaviest flying birds in the world

A BLEAK PICTURE

The captive breeding project finally seems to be making some headway after these bottlenecks, but the experience has been strenuous and the future of the GIB still hangs by a thread. "We are learning here with no precedents about artificial incubation, hatching, rearing and captive breeding," says an officer of the Rajasthan wildlife department. "The Houbara bustard has been reared and bred in captivity successfully. [But] we don't know how chicks born here will behave. GIBs are similar to Houbara, but different in weight, size and flight." For scientists, too, it has been a learning process, as captive breeding of GIBs is new. "These birds take about four years to mature. The oldest ones at our facility are three years old now, and it may take a few years before they start breeding in captivity," says Dutta.

Experts are also worried because the factors that pushed the GIB to this precipice remain. So, even a new generation born in captivity will be at risk once it is released into the wild. The major threats, as environmentalist and former bureaucrat M.K. Ranjitsinh points out, are power lines and solar parks. The GIBs, with poor frontal vision, often fail to detect power lines in time and get killed due to collisions. Almost 15 per cent of deaths occur because of high-tension lines, and the 13,000 sq km biodiversity-rich area around Jaisalmer city has a dense network of such transmission cables. Being terrestrial, the GIBs also walk more, and solar panels laid out across their desert habitat leave little place for them to forage and lay eggs. Birds that fly into Pakistan are often killed by hunters, while on Indian territory they face risks from animals.

A Supreme Court order in April 2021, following a public interest litigation filed by Ranjitsinh, directed that high-voltage transmission lines of all existing and new projects in Rajasthan and Gujarat, mostly solar and wind energy, be laid underground. The court also ordered that diverters be used to protect the birds. This has proved to be expensive—as per industry estimates, moving transmission lines underground may cost nearly Rs 22,000 crore—and thus, very little has changed on the ground. In fact, the Union ministries of environment, power and renewable energy had in the same year sought a modification of the order. Currently, the Centre and the Gujarat and Rajasthan governments are working together to file a plea stating that a low birth rate among GIBs is the key problem, not deaths due to power lines.

Conservation efforts have also encountered socio-economic hurdles. While it was easier to create protected areas for India's forest-dwelling tigers and lions, doing so on private land for GIBs, which live in agro-pastoral landscapes, has been difficult. For instance, state governments created protected areas for bustards in Solapur in Maharashtra and Karera in Madhya Pradesh in 1979 and 1981, respectively, but these encompassed large tracts of private land, thus affecting local livelihoods. The step alienated the very people who were earlier supportive of conservation efforts. Now, locals around the Desert National Park have been demanding that its area be reduced, and Gujarat officials have suggested that Rajasthan take their six female birds so that Gujarat, like Karera, which has been denotified, can free up some land. This has angered conservationists, who say that the native habitat of GIBs can be repopulated with birds born in captivity.

Amid these setbacks, the Great Indian Bustard continues to fight for its existence. In October, one was killed in Jaisalmer after it flew into a power cable. It was the second such death in the area since 2020. With their numbers dwindling, each death is a grim warning. Can the captive breeding project reverse the tide? Perhaps, but not without the support of civil society, the state, and a sincere commitment to development that's not at the cost of the environment. ■

YOGENDRA PRATAP

SAFETY FIRST

SAFETY FEATURES OF CARS ARE ON THE MINDS OF BUYERS LIKE NEVER BEFORE. FROM SEAT BELTS TO CRASH TESTS, HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD LOOK OUT FOR

I get hundreds of queries every month across India about all types of cars that people want to buy—from those who ask about budget entry level cars to those who don't consider the price at all. Over the years, I have seen various trends emerge. Whether it is a shift towards a certain body style or the desirability of certain features, I know what people are interested in and what they finally buy. Over the past six months or so, there has been a big increase in queries about, firstly, electric cars and, secondly, how safe the cars in question are. While safety features have been on customers' minds for many years now, there used to be a big disconnect between the actual purchase decision and concerns about safety. This is beginning to change. The final purchase decision for more people is increasingly being influenced by safety features and ratings. But many are still confused about what constitutes a safe car and how to decide which is a safer car. Here are some pointers you can check that will help you choose a safer car.

First and foremost, no matter how safe a car is, if you aren't wearing a seat belt, you are placing your life in the hands of chance rather than being protected by safety features. This holds for every seat in the car, not just those in the front. In fact, rear seat passengers can cause injuries (that can be fatal) to people in the front if they are not wearing seat belts even if the latter are.

Various agencies crash test cars and rate them, including Global NCAP, which is testing Indian-made cars under its #SaferCarsForIndia campaign. Under these

CRASH COURSE

1: Airbags supplement seat belts

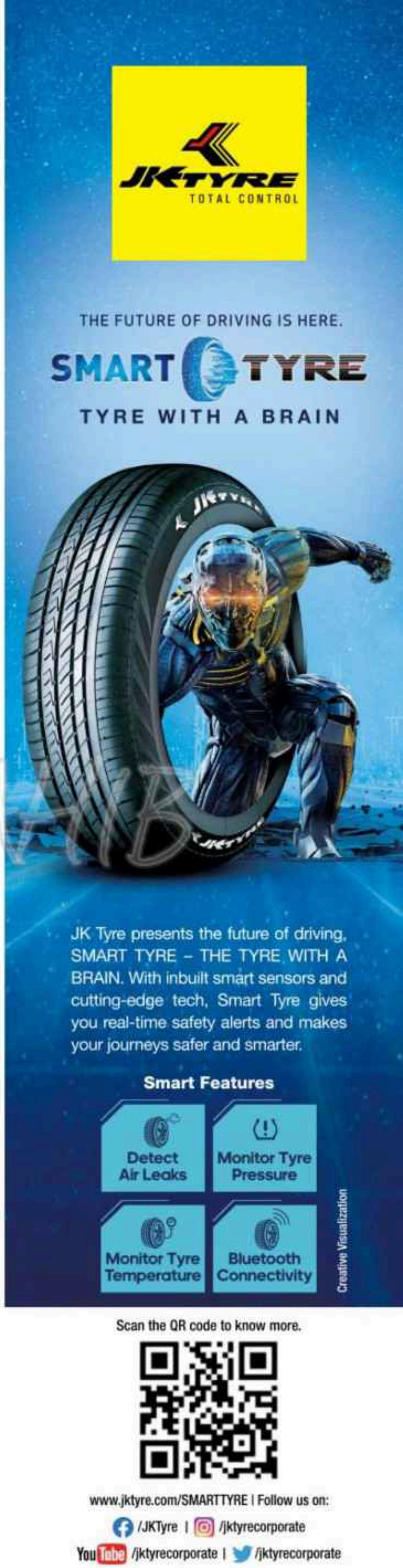
2: Seat belts are primary restraint systems

3 &4: Both Mahindra XUV700 & Skoda Kushaq get five-star rating

programmes, each car is rated on a five-star scale for both adult and child safety (in some for pedestrian safety too). Their websites have actual scores that can help you decide between cars with the same star rating. Also worth noting is the equipment levels of the cars tested and if the scale is actually comparable. For example, Global NCAP has just shifted to a more rigorous regime, so earlier ratings are not exactly comparable to those done later this year and in the future. Similarly, ratings of other new car assessment programmes may or may not be applicable to the same models in India.

I have said that airbags are good to have but not essential for safety. That is validated by the fact that some cars get five-star ratings with only two airbags, while others with six have at times got only three stars. There are other more critical safety factors and structural integrity is one. If the car has been assessed, there would be a comment on that on its ratings sheet. Finally, ADAS features lead to roads being safer and active safety systems like ABS and ESP help prevent accidents. It is best to have them as they prevent accidents rather than ensure that you are safe in case of an accident.

But if you have no idea how safe your car is, make sure everyone is wearing seat belts, as that will save lives, reduce the scale of injuries and at times help people walk out of crashed cars unscathed. ■


JKTYRE
TOTAL CONTROL
THE FUTURE OF DRIVING IS HERE.
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FOR THE FAST LANE

THESE NEW CARS PROMISE THE BUYER AN EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE ON THE ROAD

MAHINDRA XUV300 TURBOSPORT

Mahindra has launched the XUV300 TurboSport with a more powerful 1.2-litre three-cylinder turbocharged petrol engine that develops 130 bhp and 230 Nm of torque and comes paired with a 6-speed manual shifter. This motor has a direct injection fuel system that gives it an extra 20 bhp compared to the 1.2-litre turbo-petrol, enough for a claimed 0 to 60 kmph sprint in 5 seconds. With the introduction of this variant, the Mahindra XUV300 becomes the most powerful offering in the sub-4m compact SUV segment that includes the likes of the Venue, Sonet, Nexon and Brezza.

PRAVAIG DEFY

Bengaluru-based automotive start-up Pravaig has revealed its first electric SUV called Defy. Its exterior sports sharp angular lines that are reminiscent of the Range Rover while the interior remains under wraps for now. A dual-motor set-up enables all-wheel drive capability. Pravaig is claiming a range of 500km on a single charge with its 90.9kWh battery pack. Bookings are open at Rs 51,000 with deliveries set to commence from Q3, 2023.

Engine
Dual electric motor
Power
402bhp
Price
Rs 39.50 lakh
(ex-showroom)

TOYOTA URBAN CRUISER HYRYDER

Developed alongside the Grand Vitara, the Urban Cruiser Hyryder comes with the same features and powertrain options as its Maruti Suzuki twin. But a slightly different nose and a different set of tail lamps set it apart. It too comes with 1.5-litre mild hybrid and strong hybrid petrol powertrains, with the former getting both manual and automatic gearbox options as well as an AWD variant.

Engine
1.5L petrol/ 1.5L petrol hybrid
Power
103bhp/ 116bhp
Price
Rs 10.48-18.99 lakh (ex-showroom)

TATA TIAGO EV

Engine
Electric motor
Power
61bhp/ 75bhp
Price
Rs 8.49-11.79 lakh (ex-showroom)

The Tiago EV is one of the most affordable electric cars in India at prices starting from Rs 8.49 lakh (ex-showroom). Visually, it retains the overall design of its petrol counterpart except for minor EV-specific exterior and interior enhancements. Tata is offering the Tiago EV with two battery pack options. The 19.2 kWh variant has a claimed range of 250 km, while the 24 kWh variant offers a claimed range of 315 km. Features include AppleCarPlay and Android Auto connectivity via a 7-inch touchscreen, auto aircon, cruise control and multiple regen modes, to name a few.

CITROEN C5 AIRCROSS

The updated C5 Aircross SUV comes with refreshed exteriors, including new headlamps, revised tail lamps and bumpers. The interior gets significant updates with a revised centre console housing a larger 10-inch infotainment screen along with a toggle to switch between gears. The five-seater is available in a single trim powered by a 2-litre diesel engine paired with automatic transmission. Rivals include Hyundai Tucson and Jeep Compass.

Engine
2.0L diesel
Power
177bhp
Price
Rs 36.67 lakh (ex-showroom)

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MAKE THE WORLD A GREENER PLACE,
MILE BY MILE.
• Lower noise & better combustion
• Reduced emissions*
●5.29% CO ●4.99% NOx ●130 Grams of CO2 per Litre of Diesel
Increases fuel economy by 5-6%*
IndianOil

VOLVO XC40

Volvo has upgraded its entry-level SUV with revised headlamps, bumper and interior. Offered in two new colours– Fjord Blue and Sage Green–it has an updated Android-based OS for the infotainment system along with a digital instrument cluster. Features include Apple CarPlay, 14-speaker Harman Kardon audio system, adaptive cruise control, pilot assist, lane-keeping assist, blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alert. A new 2-litre turbocharged petrol engine paired to a 48V integrated starter-generator produces 7 bhp more than the old engine. An 8-speed automatic torque converter sends power to the front wheels.

BHADOO SHAB

BMW M5 50 JAHRE M EDITION

Celebrating 50 years of the M brand, BMW has introduced the exclusive M5 Competition 50 Jahre M Edition in India. Finished in Aventurine Red, this special edition sports the 50 Jahre M emblem. Comfort access system and soft close doors are offered as standard, while the rest of the features list is largely identical to the regular M5 Competition. Performance is astounding with its 625bhp turbocharged petrol V8 enabling it to hit 100kmph in just 3.3 seconds. BMW India plans to launch ten 50 Jahre M Edition cars in India, of which eight are now on sale.

ON HOT WHEELS

NEW MODELS FROM THE STABLES OF JAWA AND ROYAL ENFIELD, PLUS AN ELECTRIC SCOOTER

JAWA 42 BOBBER

Jawa's latest is based on its bestselling 42 model and follows the same form factor we have seen from the brand in the Perak's case. It sports a quintessential Bobber look and comes in three colour schemes. It has an LED headlamp and tail lamp. The motorcycle has disc brakes on both ends with dual-channel ABS. It sports the same 334cc engine as the Perak in an identical state of tune, but has a significantly lower price tag.

Engine
334cc
Power
30.6bhp
Price
Rs 2.07-2.09 lakh
(ex-showroom)

ROYAL ENFIELD HUNTER

The Hunter 350 is offered in Retro and Metro variants, with the latter further split into the Dapper and Rebel series. With different design elements and colour schemes, buyers get to choose from 23 different combinations. The Metro has dual-disc brakes along with a dual-channel ABS, while the Retro makes do with a drum brake at the rear and a single-channel ABS.

Engine
349cc
Power
20.2bhp
Price
Rs 1.50-1.69 lakh
(ex-showroom)

OLA S1 AIR

S1 Air, Ola's entry-level electric scooter with a conventional telescopic front and twin spring suspension at the rear, uses drum brakes for both wheels and can reach a speed of 90 kmph. A 4.5 kW motor draws power from a 2.5 kWh battery pack, which gives the S1 Air a single-charge IDC range of 101 km in eco mode and can be fully charged with a home charger in 4.5 hours.

Engine
Electric motor
Power
6bhp
Price
Rs 84,999
(ex-showroom)

DROP-DEAD GORGEOUS

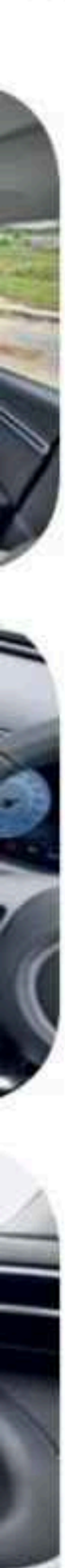
WE DRIVE THE FOURTH GENERATION OF THE TUCSON, HYUNDAI'S FLAGSHIP SUV, TO FIND OUT WHAT ELSE IT HAS APART FROM THE STUNNING LOOKS

BY YOGENDRA PRATAP

I had driven the fourth-generation Tucson late last year in the US and was eagerly waiting to drive it in India to see what all changes Hyundai would make to the car considering that this would be their flagship in the country.

The exteriors of the new Tucson in India are exactly the same as on the car that I had driven last year and my first opinions on the looks of the car are exactly the same today. I had said that for the fourth generation Tucson, Hyundai has taken design to another level, mixing advanced lighting tech with design elements to accomplish what SangYup Lee, the head of Hyundai's Global Design Centre, has been calling sensuous sportiness in a mission to elevate the emotional qualities of automotive design. Geometric patterns that Hyundai is calling parametric jewels are repeated throughout the design of the vehicle and are further enhanced by the innovative use of lighting technologies. For example, when the lights are switched off, one cannot make out that the DRLs are integrated into the parametric design elements of the grille. Hyundai is calling these Parametric Hidden Lights and the feature has been used in the tail-lights as well. This design feature has also been used on the sides as well as on the rear bumper with both featuring parametric jewel-like design elements.

The instrument panel is digital like that on the Alcazar but bigger and is one of the two 10.25-inch screens to be found on the Tucson but with even more features. The second 10.25-inch screen is a touchscreen and serves as a display for the infotainment system. While on the US-spec Tucson, the gear shift lever was missing with shift-by-wire technology replacing the gear-lever with buttons, Hyundai India plays it safe and goes with a conventional gear shift lever. That apart, the big change is also the addition of the full range of ADAS features as well as a Bose surround



sound system and electric buttons on the side of the front passenger seat to allow the rear passenger to adjust the seat in front of them while seated at the back. This and other features like the reclining rear seatback, charging ports at the rear along with air-con vents make the Tucson not only a driver's car but also one for the rear passengers—something that is crucial to the Indian market.

Hyundai has stuck to the tried-and-tested 2.0-litre powertrains for India with both the engines being carried forward from the previous generation Tucson. The diesel variant with the 8-speed automatic transmission makes it one of the best powertrains in the country in terms of providing great drivability as well as good efficiency. Its transition to the new-gen model seems to have made it quieter and smoother without compromising on quick acceleration and drivability. Of course, there is also the HTRAC 4WD system on offer with drive modes to help negotiate different types of terrain.

Hyundai Tucson Signature 4WD
Engine 2.0 diesel
Power 186bhp
Torque 416Nm
Gearbox 8-speed AT
Price Rs 34.5 lakh (ex-showroom)

The ride and handling characteristics are also very similar to the previous generation Tucson with the suspension set up on the stiffer side to replicate car-like behaviour on the road with minimal body roll and the ability to glide over bad road surface conditions at higher speeds.

The Tucson offers more or less everything that one can ask for from an SUV of this size with ample space and is full of features that are found in the high-end premium and luxury cars that perhaps cost twice as much. It is value for money and would be scoring over both lower- and higher-priced SUVs on that front. And to top it all, it is an absolute head-turner and would make the buyer feel good about their purchase every time they go for a drive. ■

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GREENER PASTURES

THE GRAND VITARA IS TASKED WITH GUIDING MARUTI SUZUKI TOWARDS SUCCESS IN THE MID-SIZE SUV SEGMENT

BY DHRUV SAXENA

Maruti Suzuki has joined hands with Toyota to take the fight to segment leaders Hyundai Creta and Kia Seltos as well as the Skoda Kushaq, VW Taigun and MG Astor. The Grand Vitara and Toyota's Hyryder might be very closely related, but Maruti Suzuki has done a fine job of giving its SUV its own identity. A flat upright bonnet coupled with a large chrome grille and neatly executed split headlamps give this SUV a contemporary yet imposing look. The rear gets very attractive LED stop lamps that extend almost across the length of the boot while the reverse lamp and indicators are mounted on the bumper.

The layout, switchgear, steering wheel—essentially every component—are shared with the Hyryder. There's a healthy list of features on offer, including a 9-inch touchscreen with wireless Android Auto and Apple CarPlay connectivity along with automatic climate control, an auto-dimming rearview mirror, electrically adjustable ORVMs, TPMS and 360-degree camera view, to name a few. Features like ventilated front seats, a head-up display, and wireless smartphone charging are reserved for the strong hybrid variant.

While the front seats are very comfortable, they can't be electrically adjusted. The quality of plastics could have been better too. The rear seat boasts generous knee room with good under-thigh support and the recline function helps further bolster the comfort quotient. The headroom is just about adequate, though.

Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara Alpha+
Engine 1.5 petrol hybrid
Power 115.56bhp
Gearbox e-CVT
Price Rs 19.49 lakh (ex-showroom)

With a combined system output of almost 116bhp, the hybrid variant is fairly quick off the line. A claimed figure of 27.97kmpl combined with a 45-litre fuel tank theoretically translates to a range in excess of 1,200km. Its ride quality feels very European in the sense that it is on the harsher side at low speeds, but improves significantly as speeds rise and the SUV feels very well tied down to the road at triple-digit speeds.

The Grand Vitara has plenty going for it, including contemporary looks, a long list of features, impressive handling, efficient powertrains and the peace of mind that comes with owning a Maruti Suzuki. It looks set to take a substantial chunk of buyers away from the established rivals. ■

LUXURY GOES ELECTRIC

WE FIND OUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DRIVE THE S-CLASS'S ELECTRIC EQUIVALENT ON INDIAN ROADS

Mercedes-Benz EQS 580 4MATIC
Engine Dual electric motor
Power 524bhp
Torque 850Nm
Gearbox Single-speed
Price Rs 1.55 crore (ex-showroom)

BY YOGENDRA PRATAP

Mercedes has been able to price the EQS 580 rather well and that is due to the benefit that electric cars get under the new GST regime. Being assembled in India, the car attracts a GST of just 5 per cent overall as opposed to the S-Class's 50 per cent.

In size, the EQS is similar to the S-Class, being just 28mm narrower and 73mm shorter, with a wheelbase that is just 6mm shorter. However, the EQS is distinctive with its bow-like cab-forward design with a fastback style at the rear and a black panel at the front. The overall shape and the various design elements lead it to the best coefficient of drag ever seen on a production car of 0.20 that helps it achieve an ARAI-certified range of 857km.

While the exteriors are striking, the interiors look revolutionary with the MBUX Hyperscreen that incorporates three displays—one 17.7-inch at the centre, a 12.3-inch instrument cluster and a similarly sized screen for the front passenger. The seating is ultra luxurious with the rear seats also adjustable for recline while a 15-speaker Burmester surround sound system provides a fantastic aural experience.

The EQS 580 4MATIC is driven by two motors, one on each axle, producing a combined system output of over 500bhp and 850Nm. The motors are powered by a 107.8kWh lithium-ion NMC high energy density battery. The vehicle comes with a standard three-phase AC wall-box charger that can be installed for a full charge in about 10 hours.

To drive the EQS feels like it rides on air, and power is there on tap with sports-car-like acceleration. It is also extremely manoeuvrable thanks to rear-wheel drive steering that can turn the rear wheels by up to 10 degrees. Steering is light and very easy, and there are multiple modes to recuperate energy. Equipped with an air suspension, the car is raised by 25mm, much needed for our less-than-perfect roads. In addition, there are a host of driver aids and assistance systems focused on enhancing convenience and safety.

With the EQS 580, not only does one get a car that is luxurious, at the forefront of tech and green at the same time, it does away with range anxiety with a range comparable to ICE cars and drives like a sports car when one does want to indulge in some spirited driving. ■

THE ELECTRIC FUTURE

HERO MOTOCORP'S BRAND NEW VIDA V1 PRO ANNOUNCES THE COMPANY'S ENTRY INTO THE ELECTRIC MOBILITY SPACE

BY RAHUL GHOSH

Hero Vida V1 Pro
Engine electric motor
Max power 6kW
Battery 3.9kWh
Range 165km (claimed)
Price Rs 1.59 lakh (ex-showroom, Delhi)

The Vida brand takes charge of Hero MotoCorp's electric scooter movement with the launch of the V1 Pro and the V1 Plus. We rode the Pro, which is the top-of-the-line version with a bigger battery and more performance. The front end is dominated by a large LED headlight and then there is a small windscreen flanked by motorcycle-type LED winkers. The telescopic front suspension is a good move and the scooter rides on smart alloy wheels. The 7-inch colour display is bright and easy to read even under harsh sunlight. It comes with a twin-seat setup housing two compartments, one for the removable battery packs while the other offers space for storage. In all, 26 litres of cargo space is offered. A low floor thanks to the batteries sitting under the rider's seat makes for a comfortable riding position. The seat height is also friendly at 780mm. At the back, there is an LED tail light along with sleek winkers. Combined with the snazzy colour palette, the Vida V1 Pro is quite a looker then.

The Hero Vida V1 Pro is powered by two removable lithium-ion batteries with a capacity of 1.97kWh each. While these can be pulled out for a recharge, the scooter can also be charged directly using a dedicated plug. Hero MotoCorp claims an overall range of 165km on a single charge, which is rather good. One can also fast-charge the scooter up to 80 per cent in 65 minutes. The scooter comes with Eco, Ride and Sport modes, besides a custom mode. The V1 Pro can sprint to 40kmph in 3.2 seconds and keep going until it reaches 80kmph. It stays planted on the tarmac at higher speeds and inspires confidence to go faster. In case one needs to overtake in a hurry, all that is needed is to turn the throttle to the max. The scooter moves to a 'boost' mode and delivers the max power momentarily. It is extremely agile, enabling it to change lanes or cut through traffic with ease.

The Hero Vida V1 Pro offers a comfortable riding position, which, for us, is the most important thing. The range is respectable, too, and the fact that the batteries are removable is just fantastic. The only point of contention is the price, which is on the higher side. However, you are getting a scooter from Hero MotoCorp and that's worth the premium. ■

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MARUTI SUZUKI

S-PRESSO - HOT SHOT!

The new S-Presso is a strong shot of motoring goodness that'll help you kickstart a new and exciting way of life

At every stage in life, there comes a time when one yearns for something other than the ordinary. A new beginning in the mundane daily grind and a fresh start to an exciting new journey. This could come in the form of picking up a new hobby, learning a new sport or even something as simple as celebrating a new day. For many a twenty something years into life's thrilling twists and turns, a step into a solid career shows a new, uncharted road ahead and with that, comes a brand new car to accompany you in the journey ahead.

What new car? A question that presents numerous options today and then starts the long search to find a

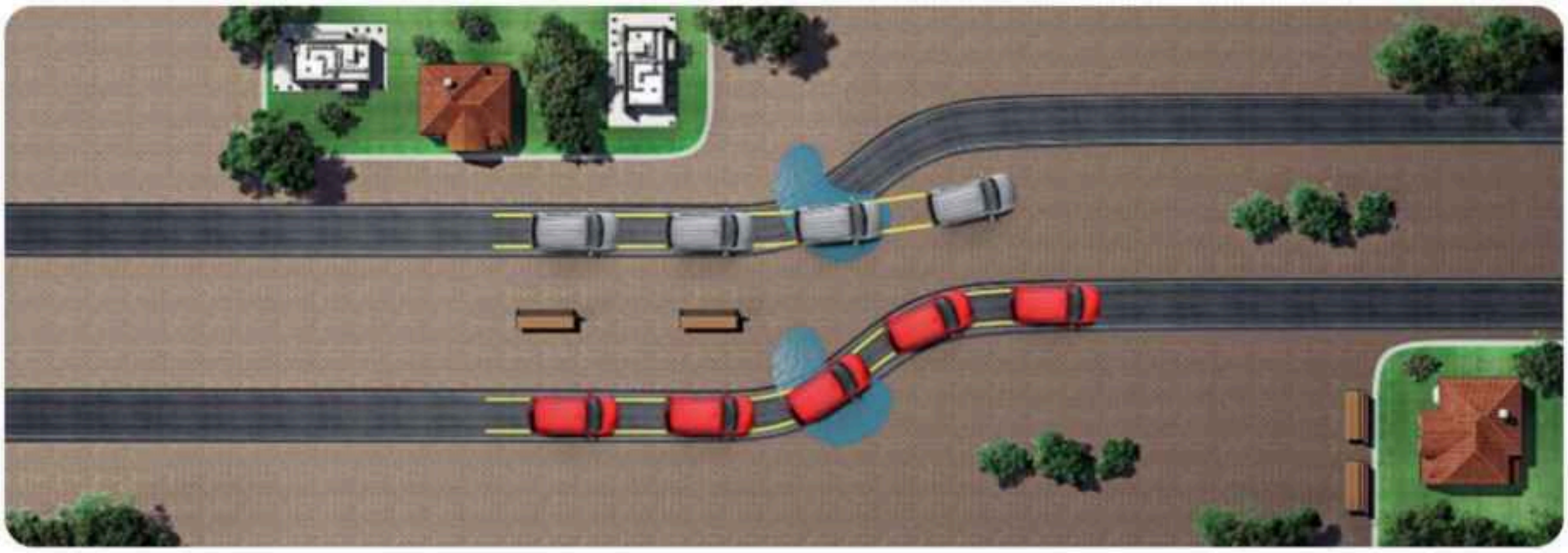
FUNKY INTERIORS

The S-Presso brings it's exciting exterior styling into the cabin with accented interior elements on the dashboard that contrast the all-black scheme, livening up the interior

dynamic and exciting new option to fulfil a variety of needs. It has to be fuel efficient, it has to be able to carry friends and family in comfort, it has to inspire and it has to be aspirational. Like that perfect shot of espresso that offers the much needed dose of energy at the start of the day, this new car needs to add a dash of zing into your life. The SUV form-factor seems to be the perfect choice. All the ruggedness to conquer varying terrains, the bold, dominating image of one, the sportiness of an adventure addict and the perfect companion to portray your distinct lifestyle for others to envy. Then again, the urban jungle has ever lessening space on offer and fitting in needs an innovative new solution, one that fulfils all of the above in a smaller footprint and a big heart to encase you and your loved ones within its innovative and safe interiors.

Enter the venerable hatchback. A genre made essential for the urban jungle and modern lifestyle needs of a young and dynamic you. Maruti Suzuki took this ideology, refined it and produced the perfect recipe for a hot cup of revitalising S-Presso, a car that's perfectly at home in the urban jungle you live in, as much as it's comfortable in those distant weekend getaways and adventures outside of it. The S-Presso imbibes qualities of the modern go-getter who aspires to achieve more in life and is forever aiming higher. With its appealing styling and being based on Maruti's Heartect 5 platform that gives it the solid underpinnings to last through all the obstacles that your new road in life might throw at you and then going on to stand right besides you on the top step of the ladder of success.

Its bold styling inspired by SUVs, takes a modern twist and condenses the same ideology of offering a rugged yet comfortable and functional car in an ideal form factor. In its latest guise, the S-Presso



MODERN SAFETY FEATURES

The S-Presso features latest safety tech with ESP, ABS and EBD helping in maneuvering at speed, hill-hold assist for hilly terrains and dual airbags as well as traction control

adds on a number of changes that make it all the more appealing than ever before. Take for instance, the bold front fascia that can be further enhanced with optional styling and accessories packages that add the glistening chrome garnish on the signature grille and DRLs that add to the glitter, never failing to announce your arrival. Comfort and convenience are upped with the addition of electrically adjustable ORVMs that are placed appropriately to be easily adjustable on the move and accurately so, so that you don't miss a single detail hidden in a blind spot. Now available in the body colour of the car also adds a dash of premium to the S-Presso's overall looks.

Within the comfortable confines of its cabin, the S-Presso's Dynamic Centre Console is presented in a funky layout that houses a digital instrumentation placed above the 7-inch infotainment system. This unit houses Maruti's SmartPlay Studio that offers seamless connectivity options and fulfils all your in-car entertainment needs while even offering various running data for you to keep a track of your journeys. Featuring first-in-class steering mounted controls, you can control communication and entertainment functions intuitively without taking your eyes off the road and then there are voice controls to further enhance convenience and make you feel in command. The dashboard itself is presented in a centrally dominating design that spreads outwards, amplifying the width of the cabin, leaving you with the feeling of space and airiness. This feeling of space has been enhanced with the rear passengers too as the S-Presso offers spacious legroom as well as headroom, backed by large window areas for your loved ones to enjoy the views along the way. Complete with a spacious boot, you can fit all your gear for that long due vacation. The S-Presso also has storage and charging options abound to keep your devices top-up at all times.

Topping up the fuel tank of your S-Presso however, isn't going to be a frequent task. With Maruti's next generation fuel efficient K10C engine that features Idle Start-Stop Technology, the S-Presso can deliver up to 25.3kmpl which is incredible for a naturally aspirated 1-litre motor. The S-Presso is also available in a CNG variant that offers an astounding 32.73km/kg of efficiency. With fuel efficiency maxed out thanks to the brilliant new K10C, the S-Presso will keep fuel stops to a bare

minimum, be it with your weekly commutes or weekend getaways, so that you can enjoy the trips, excitement and conversations that much more. This frugal engine is mated to a 5-speed manual in case you're seeking the purity of driving with clutch and gear control or even Maruti's Auto Gear Shift (AGS) that takes away the duties of controlling the clutch as well as gearshifts for you to make the drives all the more convenient.

The S-Presso's Heartect platform brings a great deal of agility and handling prowess for the S-Presso. Not just that, safety is covered in every possible way with the S-Presso featuring more than 11 safety features that include hill-hold assist and an Electronic Stability Program (ESP) to keep you and your loved ones secure through every twist and turn. Hill-hold function offers assistance on inclines where stop and go driving might be demanded, making the process all the more easier especially for budding drivers and first-time owners to negotiate traffic on your way to a hill station

DRIVING EXCITEMENT

The 1.0-litre engine packs ample power for an exciting driving experience along with incredible efficiency and ease of driving with the option of an AGS automatic gearbox

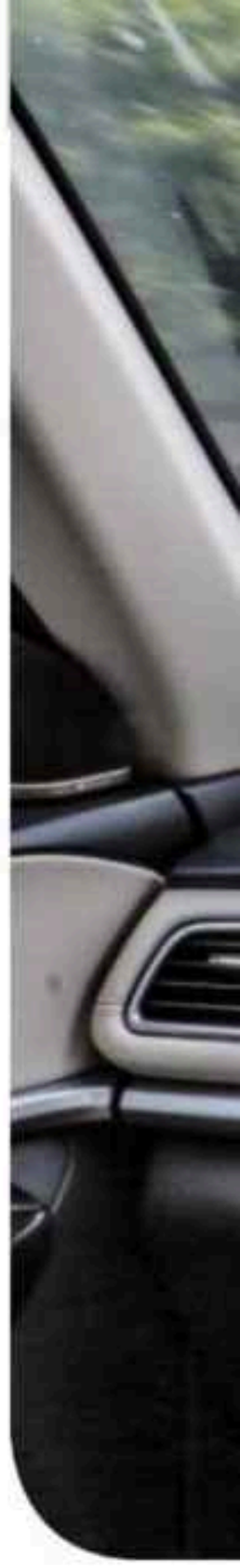
or even to pause and appreciate a stunning view in the hills. ESP offers a safety net of features that include functions like ABS and EBD which stabilise the S-Presso under heavy braking scenarios that might also require steering input and manoeuvring for instance, when avoiding an obstacle on the road. The S-Presso even comes with rear parking sensors, again a boon for new drivers as much as the experienced ones among you, for parking manoeuvres.

The bold and exciting new S-Presso is better than ever before. It's a car that makes itself home in modern metros as much as far flung areas that your adventures might take you to. Packed to the gills with modern technology, the S-Presso will move with the times, stride in stride with the young and dynamic you towards a successful future.

MAXIMIZE ADVENTURES

With 240 litres of boot space that's further expandable with the folding rear seats

INTELLIGENT DRIVING



HUMAN ERROR ACCOUNTS FOR MOST ROAD ACCIDENTS BUT WITH THE ADVENT OF TECHNOLOGY IN CARS, MANY OF THESE ERRORS CAN BE MINIMISED. WE TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE LATEST ADVANCED DRIVER ASSISTANCE SYSTEMS

BY ABHIK DAS

Reaction times for humans aren't created equally. As we all are conditioned differently, our response to sudden actions and scenarios can vastly differ. And more often than not, human error is the cause of accidents. Although human errors cannot be completely eliminated its effects can be minimised by using current technologies to assist with sensory perception. Technology can play an equaliser for everyone driving/ riding on the road, and this is where Advanced Driving Assistance System (ADAS) comes into play.

A vital collection of technologies, formerly reserved for high-end cars only, is now dropping to affordable price points, enabling more manufacturers to offer them, thus making roads safer. With cars like the new Mahindra XUV700, the MG Astor and Gloster too getting ADAS, we wanted to delve deeper into the technology to know just how it works. So here are some questions addressed about this revolutionary new system.

What is ADAS?

To put it simply, ADAS comprises cameras and radar-based sensors to make a vehicle and its driver aware of the surroundings they're operating in. In doing so, the cameras and sensors pick up inputs relating to other vehicles, pedestrians, road

signs, obstacles and lanes among other things to determine the relative position of the vehicle they're attached to. These inputs also calculate the speed of the vehicle in relation to all the other variables listed to maintain a safe distance or compensate for changes, applying emergency brakes if needed or even prompt steering to keep within lanes.

Does this mean, a car with ADAS can drive itself?

ADAS is divided into six levels of automation that varies from only warnings to partial autonomous control and to the highest level that allows fully autonomous operation of the vehicle. Basic assistance features like parking sensors, surround-view cameras, traffic sign recognition, lane departure warning, rear-cross traffic alert, forward-collision warning and any other feature that bases the final decision of action on the driver is classified as Level 0. In short, any warning system that alerts a driver of a possible object, obstruction and errors such as veering away from a lane is the basic level of an ADAS.

Level 1 and 2 take over some functions like emergency braking when warnings are ignored, steering correction if lane departure is detected and similar features. The system still uses Level 0 warnings, relying first on human decision-making, but is programmed to assist with intervention. The difference between Level 1 and Level 2 is that the former can only take over one function while the latter can control multiple functions. Adaptive Cruise Control would be an example of Level 1 autonomy while autonomous parking would be classified as Level 2 autonomy. The current crop of cars available in India offer Level 0 to Level 2 ADAS features. These features don't vary according to price as has become clear on testing various cars, such as the Mercedes-AMG E 63 S with just basic warnings, the new Skoda Slavia with multi-collision braking assistance and the Mahindra XUV that offers up to Level 2 automation of ADAS functions. At present, these systems aren't mandated by law or standardised, but

SAFE DRIVING
Earlier reserved for high-end cars, a vital collection of technologies is now dropping to affordable prices

BHADOO SAHIB

WHAT ARE KEY ADAS FEATURES?

Depending on the level of functionality and tech offered, you can expect the following features in a modern car with ADAS

Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC)

Just like regular cruise control, only intelligent. Upon setting the ACC control on, the system uses the front cameras and sensors to gauge the distance from the vehicle ahead and accordingly adjust the speed. ACC always maintains a safe braking distance from the vehicle in front.

Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB)

In conjunction with ACC or independently, AEB Uses its array of sensors and cameras to determine the speed of the vehicle in front and apply brakes if the minimum safe braking distance is suddenly shortened.

Forward Collision Warning (FCW)

In Level 0-enabled ADAS cars, the system detects close proximity to the vehicle or object in front and warns the driver, who then takes the evasive action. A Level 1 or 2-equipped system uses AEB to maximise braking to avoid the collision or minimise the damage.

Lane Departure Warning (LDW)

Veering off a lane is the first sign of a driver's lack of attention. LDW systems will issue an audio warning, or also a vibration on the steering wheel, to alert the driver.

Blind Spot Detection (BSD)

The side/ORVM-mounted cameras have a wider field of vision to detect vehicles in the blind spot of the door mirrors. Even with convex blind spot mirrors, there is still a possibility of missing smaller objects like motorcyclists.

Automatic Parking Assistance

Once only restricted to high-end cars, this system is now seen on many cars. The system gauges the space (both parallel or vertical) to park the vehicle and completely takes over steering control with only braking left to the driver's discretion.

Other functions

A few other intelligent functions are also included in ADAS like adaptive headlamps that auto-dim from high beam on recognising oncoming traffic or switch it on to illuminate an empty, unlit road. Drowsiness detection with cameras to determine falling level of attention based on eye movements and similar warning functions are available.

there is a need for standardisation so they can work effectively in a variety of conditions. Level 3 to Level 5 systems offer advanced to fully autonomous driving, where human intervention is minimal or not required at all and the decision-making rests upon the system within preset parameters, or even AI-enabled actions. These features are currently under development and some of them have not yet made it to widespread commercial use.

Can ADAS be used in all conditions?

The gradual adoption of ADAS by manufacturers and offering them at more affordable price points will surely see a decrease in road accidents and fatalities in the coming years. The bigger question is trusting the system. There is a learning curve, albeit a short one, into understanding how and in what scenarios the system works best. India presents unique traffic scenarios that vary from organised to chaotic, from completely built to lack of road infrastructure, and many variables as a result of the lack of driving discipline and vagaries of law enforcement.

In our tests, we found it best to use ADAS on roads with clear lane demarcation, predictable and moderate traffic. If the variables on the road are reduced, the set parameters do a fine job of reducing driving stress while offering some level of autonomous driving. The current level of ADAS available in cars in India always demands the driver's attention with their hands on the steering wheel at all times. This is a great start in developing trust in the automated system and technology as we build our reliance on these systems. ■

THE KUSHAQ OF SAFETY

The Kushaq has scored 5 stars for both adult occupant protection and child occupant protection. What makes this achievement significant are the new stringent GNCAP rules

Petr Solc, brand director, Skoda Auto India

SAFETY IS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR BRAND DNA. IT IS A PROUD MOMENT FOR ALL OF US AT SKODA TO HAVE INDIA'S SAFEST FAMILY CAR LEADING OUR GROWTH

Skoda is an automaker that has been acclaimed for its build quality which has helped position the Czech brand as one of the most sought-after in the Indian market. In recent times, Skoda has been on a growth path spearheaded by the INDIA 2.0 brand strategy, the project which developed the MQB-A0-IN, a localised version of Volkswagen Group's global platform that underpins the Kushaq and the Slavia.

Incorporating localisation, the MQB-A0-IN provides an ideal platform that lends a sporty and comfortable character to the Kushaq. But its biggest asset is in fact its safety which has been proved by the latest round of the Global NCAP crash tests in which the Kushaq has scored a full 5 stars. Moreover, the SUV is the first Indian vehicle to undergo the revised GNCAP test which has more stringent criteria for testing. While India has of late been producing safer cars, many of which have been awarded 5 stars by GNCAP under the older testing protocols, the Kushaq is the first and the only car to score 5 stars in both adult and child protection criteria.

Scoring 29.64 out of 34 points for adult occupant protection and 42 out of 49 points for child occupant protection the Skoda Kushaq has aced the new GNCAP crash test. Amongst the changes compared to the older GNCAP protocols are the more stringent chest load readings from the crash test dummies, compulsory side impact tests, child test dummies for side impact test, mandatory Electronic Stability Control on tested vehicles, as well as a revised scoring criteria.

The Skoda Kushaq boasts of a safety suite comprising Electronic Stability Control, ABS and EBD, Multi Collision Braking, Electronic Differential Lock System, Brake Disc Wiping, Roll Over Protection, Traction Control System, Hill Hold Control, three point seat belts and height adjustable head restraints for all occupants, driver and passenger front airbag, curtain airbags, front side airbags and ISOFIX mounts.

Assessed in its most basic safety specification, it recieved a "stable" rating for bodyshell integrity in a frontal impact. This means that while the long list of active safety features adds an impressive protection net, in the case of the Kushaq it is the added benefit of a sound chassis structure that makes the car safe for occupants. The safety rating is yet another feather in the cap for the Skoda Kushaq which has taken its segment by storm powered by powerful, refined and fuel efficient TSI engines.

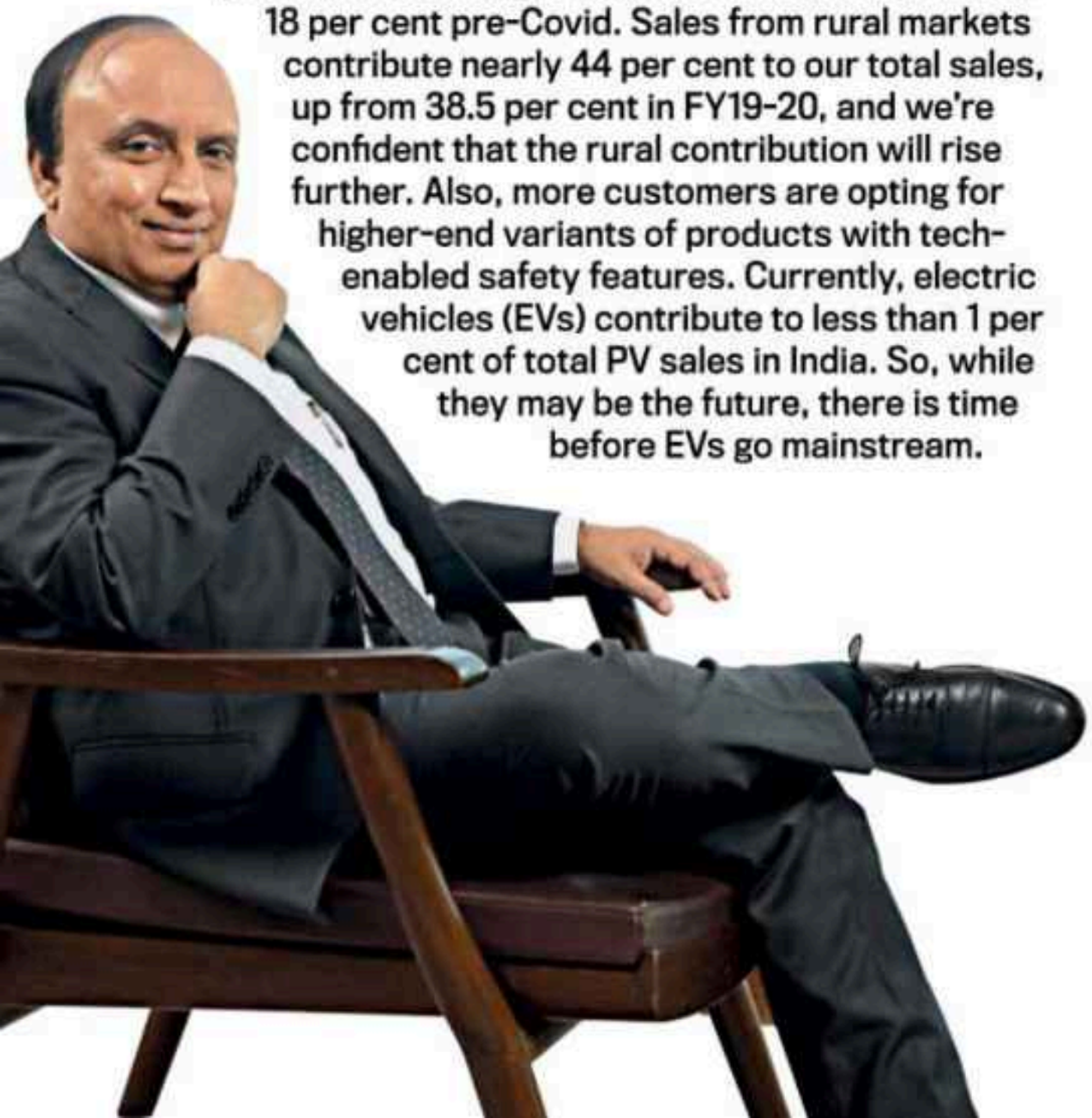
RIDING HIGH

INDUSTRY LEADERS TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF THE AUTOMOTIVE MARKET POST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE SALES BOOM THIS FESTIVE SEASON, AND THE RURAL AND SEMI-URBAN SECTORS. WHAT ALSO STANDS OUT IS THE SHARP FOCUS ON THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE SEGMENT AND SAFETY FEATURES

SHASHANK SRIVASTAVA

Senior Executive Director, Marketing & Sales, Maruti Suzuki India Limited

Post-Covid, we witnessed an increased need for personal mobility. Currently, our pending orders are over 420,000 across our model range. Covid has also accelerated digitalisation and, today, over 28 per cent of bookings are done online, compared to 18 per cent pre-Covid. Sales from rural markets contribute nearly 44 per cent to our total sales, up from 38.5 per cent in FY19-20, and we're confident that the rural contribution will rise further. Also, more customers are opting for higher-end variants of products with tech-enabled safety features. Currently, electric vehicles (EVs) contribute to less than 1 per cent of total PV sales in India. So, while they may be the future, there is time before EVs go mainstream.



VIKRAM PAWAH

President & CEO, BMW Group India

Post the pandemic, people want to live life to the fullest and enjoy the best things. Personal mobility has also gained importance. The luxury segment is not severely impacted by mild inflation changes, but unpredictable socio-economic environment, Covid-19 and high taxation do affect consumer sentiment. Nonetheless, during the festive period, all brands–BMW, MINI and BMW Motorrad–saw good demand. We also expect EV contribution to rise to 10 per cent of overall sales. Good charging infrastructure and taxation benefits will drive market development.

TARUN GARG

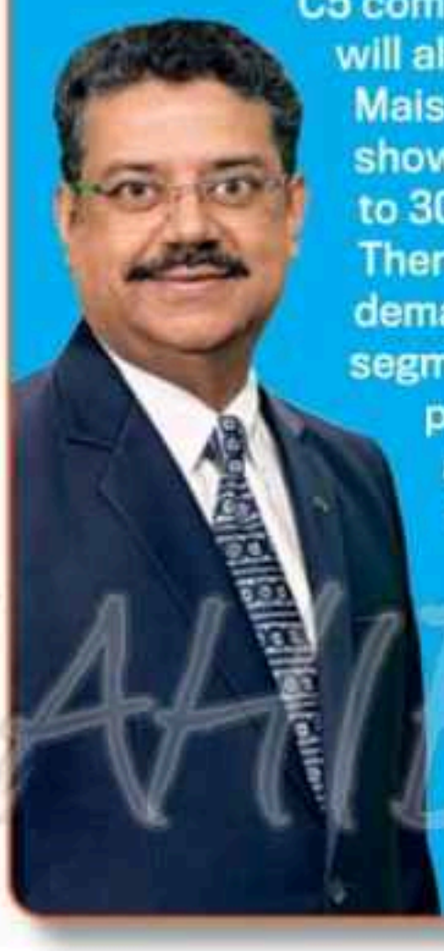
Director, Sales, Service & Marketing, Hyundai Motor India Ltd

India saw a 40 per cent rise in purchase intent for personal vehicles post-Covid, and Hyundai sold a record 550,022 units in 2021. We're also committed to the Indian government's vision of electrification: last year, we announced a Rs 4,000 crore investment in R&D for a dedicated BEV Platform, E-GMP, and a line-up of six BEVs by 2028. In a collaborative step, Tata Power will instal fast chargers at HMIL's 34 EV dealer locations across 29 cities. We are also geared up to launch the IONIQ 5 EV next year.

SAURABH VATSA

Brand Head, Citroen India

The current festive season demand has been buoyant. There are many first-time buyers for B-segment vehicles even in rural India. The Citroën C3 is seeing good demand here. On the network side, we have enabled online buying in addition to showroom sales. Quite a few customers have bought the C3 and C5 completely online. We will also expand our La Maison Citroën phygital showrooms from 20 to 30 by the year-end. There seems to be demand for EVs in some segments (at few price points). We have already planned the Citroen EC3 introduction for early next year, which will help us get an early start in the affordable EV space.



SANTOSH IYER

VP, Sales & Marketing, Mercedes-Benz India

The markets have shown good resilience despite the pandemic. We are at 40 per cent YTD growth, with an all-time high order bank of over 7,000 cars. Supply-side constraints due to factors beyond our control remain, but we're striving to meet the current demand. Mercedes-Benz vehicles are known for safety features, and it remains one of the key considerations for our customers. India's EV journey has just begun, but the tipping point may still be a few years away. We estimate that our sales volume in India in the next five to six years will comprise 25 per cent EVs.

MARUTI SUZUKI OPENS 3,500TH SALES OUTLET

With the inauguration of the latest Nexa dealership in Hyderabad, Maruti Suzuki, India's largest-selling carmaker, has opened the doors to its 3,500th sales outlet in the country, the most for any carmaker by a mile. The company set up 237 new sales outlets in FY2021-22, followed by 170 between April and October in the current fiscal year (the number includes both Arena and NEXA showrooms). Maruti Suzuki has showrooms in 2,250 towns and cities across India. ■

HONDA CITY MARKS 25 YEARS IN INDIA

City sedan, one of the pillars of Honda's success in the Indian market, has completed 25 years on sale. First introduced in 1998 and now in its fifth generation, the City is the longest-running nameplate in India. Domestic sales and exports combined, Honda has rolled out 900,000 units of the sedan to date from its manufacturing facility in the country. Currently, the carmaker offers the City in petrol, diesel and hybrid variants, with prices ranging from Rs 11.57 lakh to Rs 19.89 lakh (ex-showroom). ■

KIA DELIVERS 200 UNITS OF EV6

Launched in India in June, the all-electric Kia EV6 started reaching customers in October. Despite Kia's plan of making only 100 units for the Indian market for 2022, the company, driven by a strong response, changed its mind. To date, around 200 buyers have received their EV6, with Kia promising to fulfil more orders by the end of the year. Brought to India as CBU (Completely Built-up) units, the EV6 is Kia's first car conceived from the ground up as an electric vehicle. It's offered in both rear-wheel drive and all-wheel drive formats, priced at Rs 59.95 lakh and Rs 64.95 lakh (ex-showroom), respectively. ■

TIME TRAVEL

WE TRAVERSE A FEW THOUSAND KILOMETRES IN THE MARUTI SUZUKI GRAND VITARA, VISITING INDUS VALLEY CIVILISATION EXCAVATION SITES TO GET A SENSE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LATEST DISCOVERIES IN ANCIENT ARCHAEOLOGY

BY DHRUV SAXENA

Drive three hours to travel 6,000 years back in time. This statement by Balram Kumar, an archaeologist closely associated with the excavation at Rakhigarhi—touted as the largest Harappan Civilisation archaeological site—perfectly encapsulates the idea behind our journey covering thousands of kilometres, visiting excavation sites spread across Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. From Baror, not too far from the Indo-Pak border in Rajasthan, to Sanauli in Uttar Pradesh, to Rakhigarhi in Haryana and eventually to the National Museum in Delhi, the journey offered an insight into the history, technological advancements and evolution of the Harappans and the culture's influence on life as we know.

PAST MATTERS National Museum's Harappan Civilisation exhibit features artefacts that have been excavated from these sites

To truly appreciate the historical significance of these sites, one has to look past what meets the eye and delve deep into published accounts of their excavation and visit museums such as the one in Kalibangan or even the Nation Museum that showcase what was found at these sites right from the tools used to the jewellery worn and even mock-ups of traditional Harappan burial sites.

In many ways, the journey was akin to time travel with the Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara assuming the role of our time machine and an impressive one at that. It proved to be efficient, comfortable and a very capable road-trip companion, qualities that help make it such an attractive proposition. Good roads, smooth highways and off-road trails, the Maruti Suzuki Grand Vitara took it all in its stride and made the drive that much more enriching. ■

SOCIETY & TRENDS | DATING APPS

The Perils of e-Dating

DIGITAL ROMANCE IS BLOOMING BUT DATING APPS CAN ALSO LEAD LOVE-STRUCK VICTIMS INTO EMOTIONAL AND EVEN PHYSICAL DANGER

By **SONALI ACHARJEE** / *Illustrations by* **NILANJAN DAS**

During the fierce second wave of Covid-19 in 2021, Ananya Lohani, 23, decided to download a dating app in search of both companionship and an emotional anchor. It took the Pune-based research intern two weeks to find what she thought was a compatible match. Over the next nine months, the couple chatted daily, went on virtual dates and shared details of their lives and dreams. In 2022, Lohani was ready to meet her online boyfriend in person. But he kept dilly-dallying. "We'd fix a date and he would cancel it at the last minute. This kept happening for two weeks. Fed up, I told him I saw no future with him," says Lohani.

However, instead of accepting her decision, her online suitor kept pursuing her. "I had to change my number, email ID and social media accounts, as he would keep messaging me. Most were apologies, but some were angry drunken rants, even threats. It was terrifying." The experience left her so shaken that she went off dating. "What was really frightening," recalls Lohani, "was to discover that someone you trusted could have such a different side to them."

With the Covid lockdown limiting options to find or meet partners offline, many like Lohani had turned to dating apps—to have fun, make new friends, hook up digitally or find a potential long-term partner. According to research firm Sensor Tower, the global use of Tinder, Bumble and Hinge—three popular dating apps—collectively grew by 17 per cent between January 2019 and January 2022. A 2021 survey by Bumble, which has over 4.5 million users in India, found that as many as 42 per cent began using the app for the first time that year. The survey also found that 65 per cent of its Indian users were looking forward to meeting their matches in person in 2022. "There has been growing acceptance and popularity of meeting partners on dating apps. Many parents, too, approve of it. But little has been done to help users cope with the negative impact of unhealthy relationships," says Deekshaa Athwani, a Mumbai-based clinical psychologist.

Experts say the digital dating culture of unlimited swipes (liking or rejecting probable matches), disappearance after flawless dates and online cheating has left many users with loss of confidence, swipe (or dating app) fatigue and emotional burnout. A global survey of Hinge users found that 61 per cent of them were overwhelmed by modern dating, while an April 2022 US study showed four in five adults experiencing emotional fatigue from online dating. In India, a 2022 survey by dating app Quack Quack found nearly a third of its users feeling frustrated with the need to be desirable and 41 per cent feeling dejected about not finding a match within the first week of being on the app.

For some who have taken their relationship offline, there have also been different, darker consequences. Besides the horror story currently playing out endlessly on TV channels, of the murder of 26-year-old Shraddha Walkar, cases of rape, extortion and stalking among relationships that started on dating apps have been appearing regularly in news reports over the past year. Can you, then, really ever trust someone you meet online? "Tradition-

THE LINGO OF TOXIC DATING

A new vocabulary of dysfunctional digital behaviour

NEGGING

Short for negative feedback, it is when one hides criticism under compliments. 'You're not as dumb as you look', for example

BREADCRUMBING

When a potential partner leaves a trail of expectations but never fulfils them—from constantly postponing a date to not committing to a long-term relationship

FLEABAGGING

Inspired by the dark sitcom *Fleabag*, this is the cycle of falling in and out of love with a person who leaves you emotionally drained

ORBITING

Exhibited by people who put you through a cycle of rejections and acceptance

CUSHIONING

Happens when someone is entertaining other potential romantic options while still being in a committed relationship

ROACHING

Hiding the fact that you're seeing others from the person you're dating

POCKETING

Where a partner hides the other from the public, keeping the relationship under wraps

ally, matches happened through someone known to both persons—a family member, friend or colleague. But there was someone who would vouch for the character and personality [of the prospective partner]," says Dr Manoj Sharma, social media expert and psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru. "On digital platforms, you are starting from scratch, and it is crucial that people take time to get to know each other. Text messages alone fail to show the user's body language; so, a video call should follow. Offline meetings should happen in public and with backup support."

Experts say the first signs of abusive behaviour can be detected in online interactions and the way a user communicates. "Offline abuse, or indeed murder, doesn't just happen overnight but usually after long periods of domestic violence," says feminist activist Kavita Krishnan. "We must support victims of abuse from day one, give them the confidence to speak out and take action to stop abuse. It's only if you offer non-judgemental help that the victim will call you every single time she's in danger, which may save her life."

9 SIMPLE RULES FOR SAFE DATING

1. Spot and call out any toxic dating behaviour
2. Set clear expectations and boundaries
3. Do not share videos or photos you might later regret
4. Avoid sharing your banking details and passwords
5. Do not rush into a hook-up; try to know the person first
6. Chat on video before meeting in person
7. Meet in public spaces the first few times
8. Keep friends/ family in the loop, even after your relationship goes offline
9. Be aware of your dating app's safety features

Unhealthy dating trends

In June, a 28-year-old woman was allegedly raped in a Delhi hotel by someone she met on a dating app. A month earlier, the Faridabad police busted an extortion racket when it arrested a trio that had allegedly targeted some 25 men on Grindr—a social networking app for the LGBTQ community—after filming objectionable videos. In addition to growing safety concerns about meeting strangers online, there are other psychological worries, too. Many dating app users have reported being victims of unhealthy dating trends—from bullying to stalking, and breadcrumbing (a series of fake promises and expectations) to ghosting (someone suddenly vanishing from your digital life). In 2021, a Bumble survey found that 83 per cent women using the app in India experienced online harassment, one in three on a weekly basis. This made over half the women surveyed feel unsafe, and 48 per cent feel angry. The same year, a global survey commissioned by cybersecurity provider Kaspersky noted that while the safety features of nine popular dating apps (that also operate in India) had improved, the threat of cyberstalking and doxing (publishing private information online) remained.

A key contributing factor to such behaviour is the lack of consequences. As Kuljeet Rawal, a senior advocate, says, "Over time, one has seen the many demerits of online dating and the long-term impact on privacy, the reason being there is no specific legislation, ensuring and regulating online dating apps and their proper use." Indeed, the Information Technology Act has no standalone section that defines cyberstalking as a crime. To file a case, the complainant needs to furnish

TOP DATING APPS IN INDIA

And how they strive to keep their users safe

QUACK QUACK

Daily downloads: 16,000

Safety features: Allows users to block profiles, filter out any contact from searches. It also gives safety advice to daters

TINDER

Daily downloads: 15,500

Safety features: Photo verification for all users; faster procedure for reporting sexual violence and harassment; a new feature allows reporting specific images or messages

BUMBLE

Daily downloads: 13,500

Safety features: Provides online trauma support; protects the identity of those reporting harassment; saves messages to prevent the perpetrator from deleting evidence

TRULY MADLY

Daily downloads: 8,830

Safety features: Does not allow users to take screenshots on the app to protect privacy; gives extensive safety advice to users; blocks profiles that are violating user policy

HAPPN

Daily downloads: 8,020

Safety features: Allows reporting and blocking profiles; verifies profiles based on video evidence; certified profiles are given blue seals

*All daily download figures are average estimates for India in Feb. 2022 (Source: apptweak.com)

addressing emotions or find it easier to move on without having awkward conversations. They are not able to empathise with the receiver's feelings," says Dr Samir Parikh, director of mental health at Fortis Healthcare. Research has also established that ghosting has a clear psychological impact on the receiver—a September 2022 study in the journal *Cyberpsychology* found that those who had experienced ghosting suffered from feelings of exclusion more severely than people who faced other forms of online rejection. "It is an experience like no other—when a person gives you no explanation, no warning and just walks away from you. You feel used, feel useless, feel rejected and depressed about the idea of romance itself," says Karan Sharma (*name changed*), an 18-year-old Delhi student who was recently ghosted by someone he had been speaking to on a dating app for six weeks.

Steps to safe digital dating

Just like when dating someone offline, experts say, staying safe and protecting yourself from emotional and physical harm should be a top priority during digital chats (see *9 Simple Rules for Safe Dating*). It is important that app users communicate with each other about what they seek and are comfortable with in digital dating. Taking time to know your match—their background, interests and personality—is also a must before deciding to meet in person. To stay safe, says Rawal, a user needs to be prudent, use their common sense, be slow in their approach and, most importantly, should be cautious of digital fraudsters or scammers.

Knowing the various safety features your dating app has is also useful. Tinder, for example, has a new procedure to report sexual violence and harassment. Users can report these directly within the app even if they've 'unmatched' from someone. It has also launched photo verification, marked by a blue tick on the profile. Even Bumble has taken user safety seriously (according to the Delhi Police, Shraddha Walkar had met her live-in partner and alleged killer Aaftab Poonawala on Bumble in 2019). "Everyone at Bumble is devastated to hear about this unspeakable crime, and our hearts are with Shraddha's family," says a spokesperson of the US-based firm. "The safety and wellbeing of our members is our top priority, and we have a dedicated global team serving their needs." The app protects the identity of those reporting harassment and saves messages (per its retention policies) so that evidence can't be deleted by 'unmatching'. In 2021, Bumble also partnered with trauma support site Bloom to provide complimentary counselling to users who experience sexual assault or relationship abuse.

While dating apps do bring in convenience, fun and new possibilities, no relationship should be placed above your sense of well-being. "If you find someone is unfaithful, aggressive, manipulative, for example, it is important to communicate how you feel and set clear boundaries," says Athwani. "If they still do not change, you must end the relationship or seek support to do so." That said, even if the relationship goes offline, never socially alienate yourself—so that there is always someone to help you in case it turns sour. ■

supportive evidence such as obscene material sent to or posted about the victim. But experts say several other forms of toxic behaviour online can cause mental and emotional harm while the perpetrators escape punishment. "Sometimes, you are being harassed or just receiving emotionally painful messages that might not be 'obscene' but can cause as much pain and injury to your self-esteem and sense of safety," says Dr Sharma.

Experts say small behavioural signs—such as ghosting, breadcrumbing, actively lying or aggression—usually point to larger personality problems. Take ghosting, for example. A Bumble survey found that one in five Indians has been ghosted by someone they had been dating. "Some people avoid

QALA: A TALE OF FEMALE AGENCY PG 78

AMIT TRIVEDI: STRIKING A CHORD PG 81

BRINGING RAP HOME AGAIN PG 80

Q&A WITH ANOUSHKA SHANKAR PG 82

The Song of the Cell tells persuasively, even entertainingly, the story of 'a life within a life'

BOOKS

A THEORY OF EVERYTHING

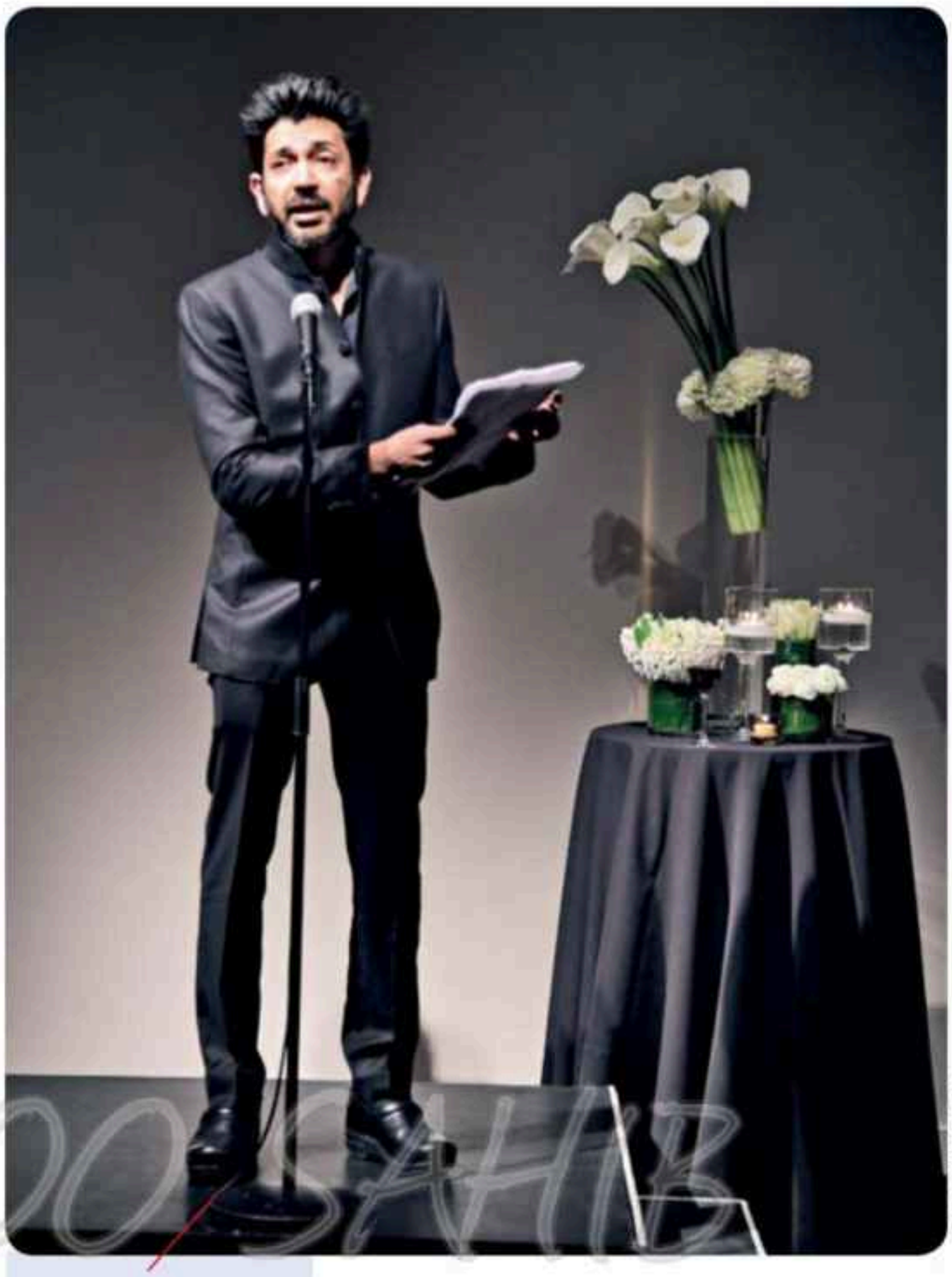
THERE IS VERY LITTLE THAT **SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE** LEAVES OUT IN HIS ENJOYABLE STUDY OF THE CELL

GETTY IMAGES

Siddhartha Mukherjee remembers well the thrill of seeing his first cell. It was a Monday morning in 1993. Mukherjee, then a graduate student at Oxford, was inspecting a kidney-shaped T cell under a microscope. "Like eyes looking back at me," he writes in his book. "And then, to my astonishment, the T cell moved—deliberately, purposefully, seeking out an infected cell that it might purge and kill. It was alive." Reading *The Song of the Cell*, Mukherjee's wonder, one finds, is often infectious. He tells persuasively, even entertainingly, the story of 'a life within a life', the unit that forms part of a whole.

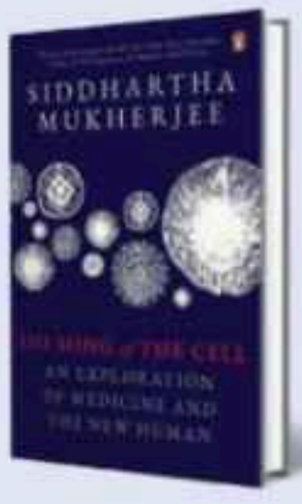
The third part of a quartet, *Song...* shares with Mukherjee's earlier books—*The Emperor of All Maladies* and *The Gene*—both its urgency and encyclopaedic thoroughness, but with this addition, says the author, "I'm sort of ascending the complexities of life's ladder." Mukherjee describes DNA as a "beautiful" and "iconic" molecule, but ultimately, he adds, "it's lifeless without cells". The physician presses on. "To really understand anything about life, you must understand its fundamental unit—the cell." Historically, cell biology has always come up as humble against the more eye-catching biological laws of genetics and evolution, but Mukherjee hopes his latest book might correct that crucial lacuna.

Given the different kinds of cells that Mukherjee inspects—everything from platelets and T cells to neurons and stem cells—his book's polyphonous tone and structure seem more organic than designed. "It was a very difficult book to write," he says. "Everything from immunology to neurology to the workings of the pancreas was being discovered together. One cell theory was established and a thousand flowers bloomed. So, the structure of this book is almost like a series of linked short stories, or a film in which you see the same thing again and again, but from a thousand different angles."



GETTY IMAGES

IN HIS ELEMENT
Siddhartha Mukherjee speaks at The Nearness of You concert in New York



THE SONG OF THE CELL: An Exploration of Medicine and the New Human
by Siddhartha Mukherjee
PENGUIN ALLEN LANE
₹799; 576 pages

Mukherjee, 52, recounts history with a raconteur's flair. There is a palpable anticipation with which we see the cell progress from the 17th century, but it is in Mukherjee's passages about the present—and its many future ramifications—that one finds cause to really get stuck in. Though the term appears repeatedly in the book, the author tells us early on that by 'new human', he does not mean "Keanu Reeves in a black muumuu". Reality, he writes, offers more convincing instances than sci-fi: a boy who has undergone a bone marrow transplant; a type-1 diabetic patient who has been infused with his own stem cells. "There will soon be people walking around with electrodes to stimulate circuits in their brain. There will be people whose organs we are transplanting with cellular therapies. So, I consider these people rebuilt, and there-

fore, a new kind of human—a chimera, if it is blood or bone marrow we're discussing, or even a prosthetic chimera, if it's an electrode that was implanted in your brain."

As a physician, says Mukherjee, he doesn't just want to mitigate suffering, he wants to eradicate it. "But my very bright line is between disease and desire. Desire has to do with emancipation, augmentation, enrichment and enhancement, so I become more suspicious and careful." Not just

Mukherjee's book reads like a series of linked stories, or a film in which you see the same thing again and again, but from various angles

does that distinction between disease and desire colour much of *Song...*, it also sets up imminent crucibles. Mukherjee brings up infertility in his book and in his conversation with us. The question he asks is simple: If most people in the 1950s, including gynaecologists, held that humans were living with infertility since the dawn of time, why was it suddenly being thought of as a disease?

"There were others who realised that for some people—and it's very important to emphasise that this is only for *some people*—there's an aching associated with infertility. Now there are hundreds of thousands of babies that are born through IVF. And so, if you have this situation where the boundaries between what is considered disease and what is considered desire are constantly changing, and often in ways that we can't predict, we must find a way to understand them."

Hearing how Mukherjee likes to rid his prose of jargon and verbiage—"like the drying of a towel"—it sometimes becomes easy to forget the rather high stakes of his day job. "I'm a very particular kind of doctor. I'm a physician scientist. I invent medicines. I like making medicines, and so a lot of my reflection has to do with how to run a clinical trial." Immuneel Therapeutics, the Bengaluru-based company that Mukherjee started with Biocon founder Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, is currently overseeing a Phase 2B trial that hopes to assess the cancer-fighting capacities of CAR (chimeric antigen receptor)-T cells. "It's a very proud moment," says Mukherjee. "But it is also a very tricky and dangerous trial. In some ways, it can be life-saving, but these are very, very difficult cells to work with."

Though Mukherjee appears to be in the habit of softening his optimism with reason, the hope in his voice is unadulterated when he tells us the story of a little boy with leukaemia, who after being administered CAR-T therapy, was pulled back from a fatal precipice. Speaking from New York, Mukherjee says, "My ambition ultimately is reverse tech transfer—to make things in India, which we can then move out or export as knowledge to the northern hemisphere and to the West. There are challenges ahead—making the therapy more accessible, reducing cost, toxicity and pain—but I do think Immuneel is realising that potential in a way I had not even anticipated when I first started this." ■

Shreevatsa Nevatia

The Better Pill

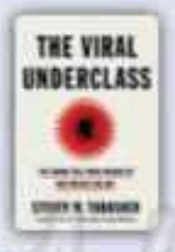
New books where medicine comes to the rescue (and some where it can't)

THE INVISIBLE KINGDOM
Reimagining Chronic Illness
by Meghan O'Rourke
RIVERHEAD BOOKS
₹1,466; 336 pages

Chronic illness can take many forms–autoimmune disease, Long Covid–but is invisible. This book asks that we radicalise our understanding of disease to reduce suffering.

PHANTOM PLAGUE
How Tuberculosis Shaped History
by Vidya Krishnan
PENGUIN VIKING
₹799; 320 pages

Though cured in the West, TB in India can resist drugs. Amitabh Bachchan survived it, Orwell didn't, but the shadow of inequity looms large over this social history of TB.



THE VIRAL UNDERCLASS: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide, *by Steven W. Thrasher,* ST MARTIN'S PRESS
₹2,156; 352 pages

This book is based on the belief that the ways in which viruses spread and take their toll are more dependent on social structures than biology. Survival is of the privileged.

THE FACEMAKER: A Visionary Surgeon's Battle to Mend the Disfigured Soldiers of World War I
by Lindsey Fitzharris
FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX
₹2,400; 336 pages

There's no real toll of how many soldiers were disfigured during World War I, but thanks to this book, we know of the lives that plastic surgeon Harold Gillies repaired.

DESPERATE REMEDIES
Psychiatry and the Mysteries of Mental Illness
by Andrew Scull
ALLEN LANE
₹1,699; 512 pages

Historically, the lives of the mentally ill have been eventful. There was the asylum at first, then Freud, then antidepressants. Through it all, this book says, suffering has only risen.

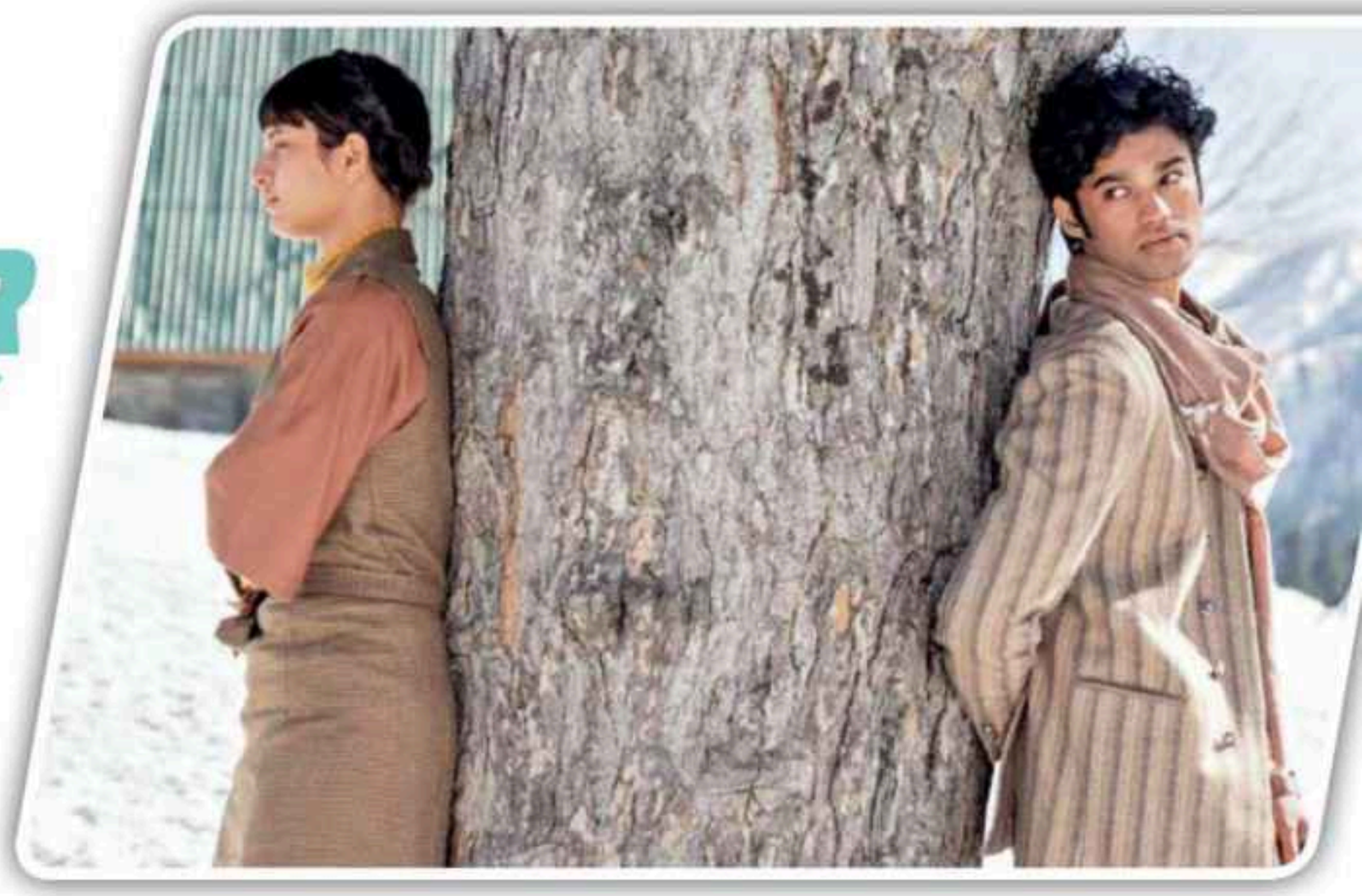
BREATHLESS: The Scientific Race to Defeat a Deadly Virus
by David Quammen
BODLEY HEAD
₹799; 416 pages

You ought not to have forgotten SARS-CoV-2, but if you've let your guard down, this science-led story of Covid-19 will leave you better prepared for the 'forever virus'.

FILM

HER SCANNER DARKLY

BULBBUL WAS A START, BUT WITH _QALA_, ANVITA DUTT PUSHES THE ENVELOPE OF FEMALE AGENCY FURTHER



In Anvita Dutt's second Netflix film, pursuing art is as much release as it is tragedy. With *Qala*, the writer-director-lyricist picks up where she left off. Like in *Bulbbul* (2020), the portraits she draws of her women are fascinating. Trapped in fabled settings, they are exploited by patriarchy, but still have the will to pursue their dream. "I don't do it deliberately. It so happens that the slightly surreal, otherworldly setting pops up when I am writing. It is my default setting," says Dutt. "I am trying to find the best possible way to communicate what I am feeling and sometimes it is best done through magic realism."

Played by Tripti Dimri, the titular character, Qala, is an enthusiastic heir to her family's rich musical legacy. Sadly, she struggles to win the support of her mother (Swastika Mukherjee). Though the key narrative device here is that of a fractured mother-daughter bond, the film highlights the emotional perils of pursuing excellence in art. In *Qala*, passion becomes ambition, then jealousy and guilt. The film feels almost like a darker sibling of *The Disciple* (2020), set against the backdrop of the Indian classical music world. Both dramas document the breakdown of artistes. One struggles to accept his limitations, the other yearns for validation.

Qala makes it hard not to think of female agency. "This is what I try to do. I draw attention to things that bother me, things that are relevant, and take it far back," says Dutt. "To most effectively do that, my protagonist has to scale a relentless wall." Qala wants to make it in the Hindi film music industry, but to do that, she must leave the protective shelter of home and live in a world of men. By transporting pertinent issues to a stylised period—in this case, the 1930s and '40s—Dutt reiterates that "nothing has changed".

The film's gaze towards women isn't solely empathetic. The mother, for instance, is a complex, humane figure. For Dutt, it highlights "the conditioning and baggage" women carry. "The choices Urmila [Swastika's character] has made, the things she is hankering for... she knows that the *taaleem* [education] may be the same but women have to work that much harder than men," says Dutt. "It's about *izzat* [respect]. The struggle becomes a lot more manageable when she translates [her dreams] to a boy." Late actor Irrfan's son, Babil, makes his debut in *Qala*, playing the singer Urmila adores.

Anvita Dutt's women characters are fascinating. They are exploited by patriarchy but still have the will to pursue their dreams

Qala's visual and aural landscape help illustrate its protagonist's internal journey. Dutt visualised Qala navigating two worlds: the "house of oppression", which has gothic undertones and referenced paintings of Rembrandt and Vermeer, and "the house of delirium", which drew inspiration from art nouveau and aimed to evoke a "feeling of oppression". The film's soundtrack, composed by Amit Trivedi and featuring works by five lyricists, says Dutt, forms "the internal soundtrack" of her female protagonist. As much as *Qala* aims to impress viewers with its imagery, music and design aesthetics, Dutt hopes that in the end, it'll lead to a conversation about a woman's struggle for acceptance. ■

Suhani Singh

WATCHLIST

THE PLOTS THICKEN

Hindi films and shows to stream this December

FREDDY

DISNEY+ HOTSTAR, *(December 2)*

Kartik Aaryan suggests that Dr Freddy Ginwala, the dentist he plays, got under his skin. With his maniacal grin and the sinister solitude seen in the trailer, we can guess why.

CAT

NETFLIX, *(December 9)*

Set in Punjab, this show follows Gurneet Singh (Randeep Hooda), an ex-police informant, who must relearn the tricks of his old trade when his brother finds himself on the wrong side of the law.

FAADU

SONYLIV, *(December 9)*

Starring Pavail Gulati and Saiyami Kher, this series tells a love story where opposites attract. Abhay and Manjiri are both poets, but will Manjiri's equanimity be an antidote to Abhay's ambition?

FILM

Always a Hero

Even while playing the villain, Jaideep Ahlawat gives his character the importance of a protagonist

Releasing on December 2, *An Action Hero* sees Jaideep Ahlawat essay a part, which, according to him, is in his blood. Bhoora Solanki, a wrestler-turned-municipal councillor, is from Mandothi village in Haryana. Ahlawat's own ancestral home in Kharkara is some 50 km away. "If somebody tells you to play yourself, that can be tricky," he says. "But I get what Bhoora is trying to say and his sense of humour. He doesn't intend it to be funny." Going by the trailer, all of Ahlawat's punchlines seem to land with a sardonic echo.

Though the film marks Ahlawat's return to the big screen after over a year, the actor has used that time to build the reputation of a powerhouse performer. There was, of course, his iconic portrayal of Hathiram Chaudhary, the honest police officer in *Paatal Lok* (2020–), but there was also his equally compelling turn as the TRP-hungry TV anchor Deepankar Sanyal in *The Broken News* (2022–). Ahlawat, though, admits to missing the big screen. It does, after all, have "its own charm". It was in cinemas that Ahlawat first made an impression, playing the no-nonsense trainer to Alia Bhatt's rookie spy in *Raazi* (2018). "During [*Raazi*], I felt my acting software was upgraded. I fell in love with my craft more," he says. But *Paatal Lok*, his first big project as a central character, was the "out-and-out gamechanger". Released during the lockdown, the industry and audiences took a shine to him. "Hathiram had all the *navarasas* [nine emotions mentioned in the Natyashastra]," he says. "The writers and directors felt that 'if you give him something, he will make it his own'."

Getting lead parts, once a challenge, now feels routine. That is how he views *An Action Hero*, in which he plays the nemesis to Ayushmann Khurrana. "I don't play a villain as a villain; I play him like a hero. If I don't, his natural *bhava* won't come across."

> For Ahlawat, Paatal Lok, his first big project as a central character, was a 'game changer'

A self-confessed "introvert", Ahlawat doesn't have a publicist. His lessons in self-promotion are incremental—he recently learned how to attach a link to an Instagram story. But the upgrading of his thespian prowess is a whole other story. Streaming, also, has ensured that he has few failures. Ahlawat often finds his name clubbed with artists like Manoj Bajpayee, Pankaj Tripathi and his FTII batchmate Vijay Varma, whose popularity seems rooted in their acting skills. "Audiences want to see actors, be it OTT or the big screen," he says.

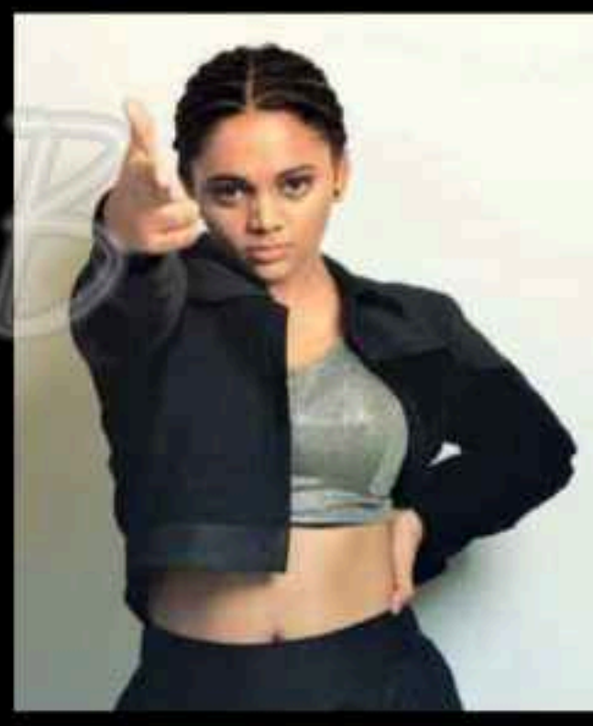
Ahlawat recently wrapped a Netflix film, an adaptation of the popular suspense novel *Devotion of Suspect X*, with Kareena Kapoor Khan. Before he sinks into second seasons of *Paatal Lok* and *The Broken News*, an independent drama somewhat quietly added itself to his filmography. *Three of Us*, starring Shefali Shah and Swanand Kirkire, was recently screened at IFFI Goa. Heroes, clearly, have no time to waste. ■

Suhani Singh

MUSIC

BRINGING RAP HOME AGAIN

It got everyone from Virat Kohli to Nargis Fakhri excited, but did **MTV Hustle 2.0** *create any real rap stars?*



When 23-year-old Srushti Tawade decided to participate in *MTV Hustle 2.0*, the second season of the country's first hip-hop reality show, she hadn't contended with the fact that the show would turn her into an overnight sensation. A completely self-taught rapper, Tawade caught everyone's attention on the show with the now-viral 'Chill Kinda Guy', in which she rapped about religious fanaticism. There was also 'Bachpan', a biting track in which Tawade confronted her thorny childhood memory of domestic violence. The spunky lyrics belie the social commentary that Tawade, one of the three female contestants, brought to both these songs. And even though Tawade didn't eventually end up lifting the trophy, her distinct voice left an indelible impression on hip-hop fans around the country.

Still, the spotlight wouldn't have come this easy for Tawade had it not been for *MTV Hustle 2.0*. Hosted by Krissann Barretto and judged by Badshah (and four squad bosses), the new season of the reality show uncovered a range of diverse talents, whether it is winner MC Square's unique storytelling or runner-up Paradox's keen ear for rhyme. Importantly, the accessible format of the show followed the foundation laid by Zoya Akhtar's immensely successful *Gully Boy* (2019). *Hustle*, too, took it upon itself to bring the hip-hop genre into Indian living rooms.

For music writer Arunima Joshua, this transition didn't seem that surprising. "Hip-hop is probably the most mainstream massy non-Indian genre right now in the country. It was inevitable that it would acquire such a national

SPOTLIGHT
Badshah (centre), the judge, with other contestants in *MTV Hustle 2.0*; (below) Srushti Tawade

platform." Joshua, however, remains unsure of whether the recognition that the *MTV Hustle* participants received from Indian audiences—including celebrities like Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma—would translate into a long and successful career. Rapper KR$NA, too, remains convinced that for anyone looking to make a name as a rapper, there can be no substitute for the "real hustle". He says, "I think reality shows can be a good platform for artists looking for a push, but I don't think reality shows are a sure-shot way to 'make it' in the industry."

In a country burdened by umpteen singing reality show competitions that often commodify new talent under the guise of discovering them, *MTV Hustle 2.0* doesn't exactly occupy a unique position. Like several other shows, it offers a templatised understanding of hip-hop, so that it can turn the genre into bite-sized entertainment. Much of the doubt over whether the show can traverse the distance between upcoming rappers and a dedicated audience also stems from the very purpose of hip-hop as an art form. KR$NA, for instance, says, "As someone who has dedicated their life to the art form, I feel that authenticity comes from the real-life grind. Any artist can only really break through in the scene if they have put in the work and connected with their own audience. Reality shows are better suited to make pop stars than rap stars, and I think [even after this season] that's quite evident." ■

Poulomi Das

Striking a Chord

Much like Amit Trivedi's film scores, the music composer's new EP also takes its cues from the heart

There's an endearing nervous energy to Amit Trivedi as he takes the stage at the Spotify office in Mumbai. His audience comprises a small crowd of journalists, influencers and AT superfans. Trivedi is here for the launch of his new EP *Jadu Salona*, which has just been released by his label AT Azaad, in collaboration with digital music company Believe. The composer, singer and lyricist—known for his outstanding work on the soundtracks of *Dev.D* (2009), *Udta Punjab* (2016) and *Manmarziyaan* (2018)—spends half an hour performing some songs and weaving all six tracks into an elaborate, *filmy* love story. "*Mujhe ishq se mohabbat hai* (I'm in love with love)," he declares at one point.

So why, after a decade of consistent success with Bollywood, does Trivedi want to entertain the risks and uncertainty of a non-film independent release? "I always wanted to go independent, always," he says when we sit down for a chat after the EP launch. "But films happened, and I was too busy to even think about my original passion. And then, one day, I had to put my foot down and make time to pursue this very old dream."

Trivedi dipped his toes into the space with the launch of AT Azaad in 2020, a label where he could put out music without any restrictions or compromises. He has already put out a few collections of tracks on the label, simply titled *Songs of Faith*, *Songs of Love* and *Songs of Trance*, but *Jadu Salona* is its first proper release. The six tracks here don't stray too far from the classic Amit Trivedi sound—contemporary electro-pop with subtle, sophisticated melodies and, yes, a *filmy* twist—but Trivedi makes good use of his freedom to experiment with more off-trend ideas on tracks like 'Nirmohi' and 'Rahiyo Na'.

"Love was the thematic starting point for the EP, and the story arc just emerged once the songs were written," he says. When I ask whether a romance-focused album is all that much of a departure from film music, he scoffs. "Love stories and rom-coms, really good ones, have become such a rarity [in Bollywood] these days. And I love that genre. *Par karta hi nahin koi* (but nobody does it)."

Trivedi plans to lock himself in a studio in Goa for a month and create a second edition of *Songs of Trance*

One Bollywood love story he has been able to work on is Anurag Kashyap's *Almost Pyaar with DJ Mohabbat*, and Trivedi is excited to team up again with one of his favourite collaborators. But what really gets him going are his plans for future moves in the independent space. He plans to lock himself in a studio in Goa for a month and create a second edition of *Songs of Trance*, and then put together a tour where he performs only his independently released music. He also eventually wants to sign more artists onto AT Azaad, offering them the freedoms he's enjoying himself.

This doesn't mean a divorce from Bollywood. As the composer points out, he feels eternally grateful for the opportunities that the film industry has given him. "*Pyaar bahut karta hun Bollywood se* (I love Bollywood a lot)," he declares. "*Par dil se indie hun* (but I'm indie at heart)." ■

Bhanuj Kappal

LISTENING TO HER SITAR

Nominated for two Grammy Awards this year, Anoushka Shankar has returned to India for a concert tour. She explains why she picks expansiveness when it comes to both her genres and her attitude

ANUSHKA MENON

BHADOO SAHB

Q+A

Q. Your India tour is a ritual now. You couldn't come for two years because of the pandemic. Did you miss it?
The fortune of coming back frequently is that somewhere it continues to feel like a home and not just the place you came from once. It keeps the connection alive. You still know the pulse of a place, the restaurants, the details... that stuff is important to feel you're at home. If I'm away from India for too long, it starts to feel like it's not mine anymore. So, I'm impatient to return.

Q. Is there a conscious effort on your part to show audiences that the sitar can go beyond the classical spectrum?
More than audiences, there's a conscious curiosity on my part to see what the sitar can do. I love cross-cultural connection and learning from other people. I love trying to work within different traditions. It's important to grow.

Q. You are presenting an extended version of 'In Jyoti's Name' at the Mumbai concert. It was a track triggered by the aftermath of the 2012 gang-rape case in Delhi...
We were all traumatised by the horrors. The world was talking about rape and violence against women at the time, and what we needed to do for things to change. It is important to return to it 10 years later, on the anniversary of her attack, and create an offering of music, because, really, what has changed? What is better?

Q. Already a seven-time Grammy nominee, you are up for two awards this year. Do you covet that trophy?
Not necessarily. Obviously, you hope to win and it's disappointing not to. But I also don't think anyone is owed a win. I try to stay grateful to be nominated.

with Suhani Singh